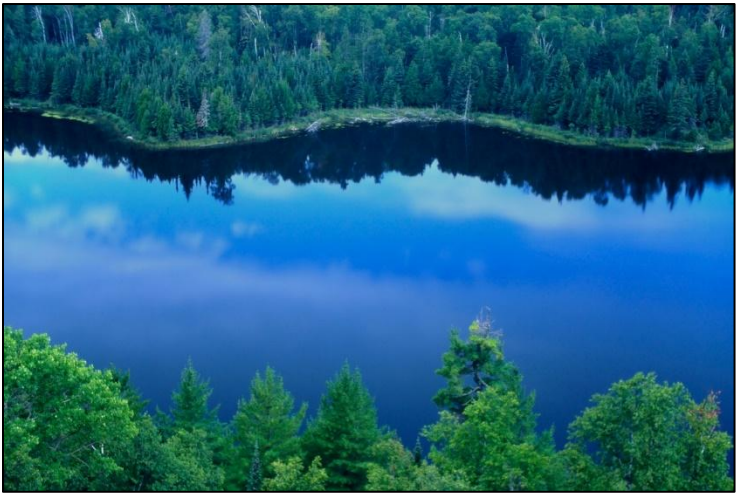
WHAT IF JESUS WERE LAZY?

What if There was a Spiritual Side to Fitness?



A Free, Browsable, PDF “Phone” Book

Kirk W. McCrea

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What if There was a Spiritual Side to Fitness?
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To Jesus, my God, Who teaches me
how to keep fighting the Good Fight

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"but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified"
(1 Corinthians 9:27)

"let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us"
(Hebrews 12:1b)

"For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS"
(Matthew 16:27)

INTRODUCTION

Physically, food and water are life, and breathing is life. Rarely considered, however, is that movement, physical activity, and exercise are also life. Compare the clarity, acidity, oxygenation, and usefulness to surrounding wildlife of pond or marsh waters to those of a stream or river, and you have a great analogy for physical stagnation versus movement and activity in people. No matter what a person's capacity, physical activity will help. The same is absolutely true, spiritually, for those who believe in Jesus. Living one's life by belief in church doctrines versus belief in all that the Savior said on how we are to think, act, promotes either stagnation or movement of His "living water" in us, respectively.

What if Jesus were Lazy is written in an interrogative (What if…?) format to promote reflection on the differences between Christ's body (the church) thinking and acting with its own head rather than Jesus as the head. The foundation for this comparison is Jesus' red-letter, self-denying teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments as the rock of faith on which a Christian is supposed to stand, versus any other "Bible Truth" that can be used as a warm, sandy beach to stand on. What if *"everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts (or does not act) on them…"* (Matthew 7:24a, 26a)?

Perception 1
What the Bible Says About Fitness

What if the Bible says very little about *physical* fitness but is saturated with how to be *spiritually* fit? What if it didn't even promote physical fitness with, *"On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come"* (1 Titus 4:7b-8)? What if it even seems to concede *"Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day"* (2 Corinthians 4:16)?

What if, however, the Bible's teachings on being spiritually fit are saturated with analogies and context of occupations, works, efforts, striving, enduring, and persevering? What if being a farmer, a fisherman, and a soldier were just a few examples? What if being an "investor" of what one had was another example, and even came with eternal promises and warnings? What if the eternal warning to the one who did nothing with their "talent" is *"But his master answered and said to him, 'You wicked, lazy slave, you knew that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I scattered no seed'"* (Matthew 25:26)? What if paying attention to show even a little faith to be spiritually fit will avoid *"For to everyone who has,*

more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away. Throw out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 25:29-30)?

What if the Bible doesn't say much about physical fitness and exercise, even though our bodies are given as part of those "talents" to glorify God with? What if it does say, *"Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body"* (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)? What if this verse pertains to immorality, but nonetheless states the importance of the vessel, and regardless of the state of the vessel, it can be exercised for strength to facilitate its eternal purpose of our spirit with God's Spirit?

What if, likewise, we are commanded *"AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH"* (Mark 12:30), where strength certainly refers to all our physical capabilities? What if there is also a hope for sanctification of the body in, *"Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (1 Thessalonians 5:23)? What if Jesus, obviously, is the forerunner of a completely sanctified body, made whole and free from all past starvation, hardship, illness, injury, torture, and death? What if there's a lot of spiritual fitness to learn and do that will help progress our physical fitness – and vice versa?

Perception 2
What if Jesus were Lazy?

What if Jesus were lazy? What if He didn't follow any of His own or New Testament teachings to demonstrate faith through (you can search each word) working, striving, laboring, fruit bearing, obedience, discipline, seeking, pleasing, sowing, deeds, perseverance, and endurance? What if Jesus didn't pay attention to His own teaching that *"We must work the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day; night is coming when no one can work"* (John 9:4)? What if He thought these "works" weren't equally important for life as eating food every daily when He said, *"My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work"* (John 4:34b)?

What if Jesus wasn't lazy but He thought, *"the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work"* was to take care of His own needs by getting a job, keeping a roof over His head, and putting food on the table? What if it was hard work taking care of Himself and He needed to spend His non-working time relaxing and refreshing Himself to get ready for the next day or the next week of work? What if that life was perfectly normal for everyone around Him, and who would find fault with it?

What if, however, that type of life's work replaced His 3.5 years of walking up and down the length of Israel, not having a place to lay one's head at night, not having

guaranteed food throughout a day or for days at a time, spending lots of time exposed and vulnerable in the wilderness, spending lots of time around the destitute, criminal, the insane, and those who were violent, terminally ill, or highly contagious? What if the pursuit of a "normal life" meant He didn't have to be around so many people who absolutely despised Him while still providing them with healing, blessings, and teachings? What if the pursuit of "just living" replaced having to watch most people (including your family) ignore you, walk away from you, not understand you, sneer, mock, and criticize you? What if it avoided the public trying to stone you, throw you over a cliff, betray you, abandon you, arrest you, beat you to a pulp, spike your naked body to a cross, and hoist you vertically for everyone to mock and sneer as you slowly died? What if Jesus, by deciding to be a responsible, hard-working, GNP-contributing member of society, avoided this death and its continued work in bringing a criminal into paradise with Him, adopting His faithful but aging mother to a family that would care for her, asking His Father to forgive all of those who were doing this to Him, and bearing the sins of all people ever born? What if the world's definition of being lazy and God's ideas of being lazy are not the same?

What if, however, Jesus was not lazy, spiritually or physically, but His family (except Mary) probably thought He was since He left the family carpentry business that supported His 4 brothers, at least 2 sisters, and earthly mother and father? What if, *"For not even His brothers were believing in Him"* (John 7:5), and one could certainly speculate that they weren't happy with the lack of His family support and thought He was just seeking outside attention? What if the Pharisees and Lawyers always insinuated that He was a lazy glutton, a drunk, and a

"friend of sinners"? What if "a friend of sinners' is now a false precept of the modern church that replaces being a Savior of sinners and their need for repentance of sins?

What if Jesus wasn't lazy and is still not lazy since, *"But He answered them, 'My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working'"* (John 5:17)? What if Jesus is the head of His church and His church is meant to be the continuation of His body and His work on earth? What if "His body" is supposed to still work the works of His Father on earth? What if He spoke this to all Christians with, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father"* (John 14:12)?

What if these expected works weren't about great miracles but works that would be light to the world, witness of Him, build His kingdom, and glorify God? What if that witness included His hardships, not coveting the comforts and securities of life, forgiving others for dismissing, ignoring, or slandering you, giving time and resources to those who were indignant and ungrateful, and hoping in God that it would glorify Him? What if He told us what that witness of words and deeds would look like by His red-letter, self-denying, and life-losing Sermon on the Mount, Gospels, and Revelation? What if it went way past explaining doctrines about "the propitiation of sins" to how to live, act, and think toward God and one's neighbor? What if being "a witness" for Him included being physically or verbally oppressed and turning the other cheek, going the extra mile, and "giving your shirt as well"? What if it included *"giving all that* [one] *had to live on,"* forgiving to maintain God's forgiveness, seeking the last place, not letting your left hand know what your right hand is doing while caring for *"the least of these, My brethren,"* greeting and loving those who don't greet and

love you, loving your enemies, confessing Him to a hostile world, losing your life for Him to gain it from Him, and enduring to the end?

What if these things are a witness (proof) to the world that Jesus is real, and what if they are a witness (proof) to God that His Holy Spirit abides in us? What if, however, Jesus warned of His enemy sowing tares and of many false teachers that would help in the sowing? What if Jesus is Truth and all He said is truth, and any teaching that does not encompass His teaching or build off of His teaching is not truth? What if the black-letter written word (and its interpretation) must line up with the red-letter Living Word? What if *"Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds"* (2 John 1:9-11)?

What if the theology, doctrines, and precepts of the tares and false teachers, over time, made people drift, forget, ignore, reinterpret, and even dismiss Jesus' teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments on what real saving faith in Him looks like? What if His teachings were replaced with lots of catchphrases and precepts that let Christians live their lives with justified, "lazy" licentiousness and "belief" in doctrines about salvation rather than in the Savior Himself? What if the precepts included hyper grace for "God loves you just the way you are, "filthy rags" that discouraged all good works, "let go and let God" to get rid of accountability, "His power perfected in our weakness" to justify the flesh and sin, Jesus' "finished work" on the cross so we don't have to do anything for and with Him, and "when God sees me,

He sees Jesus' holiness and righteousness covering me" so I don't have to be and can't be, anyways? What if this type of Christianity was based on sand from decades of cherry-picked verses rather than the rock of living out Jesus' red-letters? What if this type of Christianity were way easier than the one that Jesus laid out throughout His Gospels with all its conditions, warnings, and judgments?

What if, regardless, Jesus is still the *"Author and Perfecter of faith"* (Hebrews 12:2b), and *"So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ"* (Romans 10:17) and *"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away"* (Matthew 24:35)?

Perception 3
Fitness

What if "fitness" certainly included exercise in all its various forms, from bodybuilding or triathlons to flexing your hands or feet in a hospital bed while on the road to recovery? What if it also came from "doing" or "practicing" whatever it was that one was trying to do better or just maintain a certain level? What if that included any type of education, career, or just living day to day? What if it included being a student, a homemaker, a driver, a DIYer, or a pet owner? What if all those things took (a lot of) effort, management, strategy, and perseverance to continue? What if, on top of daily work and living, one were trying to stay physically fit through exercise that met the same criteria? What if, in general, Merriam-Webster defines fitness as "the capacity of an organism to survive and transmit its genotype to reproductive offspring as compared to competing organisms," where "competing organisms" for people are time, tide, and life?

What if there was a spiritual component of fitness and outcome of life? What if spiritual fitness changed the above definition of "the capacity of an organism to survive and transmit its genotype to reproductive offspring as compared to competing organisms" to "the capacity of a Christian to thrive and bear eternal fruit by planting and

watering Jesus' words and deeds as compared to the competing darkness of the world"? What if an investment in spiritual fitness were just as varied, but just as important, as an investment in physical fitness? What if being spiritually fit as a Christian was why we are saved, and it demonstrates that we were actually saved? What if "use it or lose it" also applied to being a Christian? What if Jesus' warning is still true in *"Therefore take away the talent from him, and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has, more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away"* (Matthew 25:28-29)? What if the works of the law are, of course, without life in them, but works of faith to believe Jesus to follow and obey Him are life because Jesus is Life? What if Jesus' words above are not "mean" but are the path of real life, and He wants everyone to have that life? What if He continues with *"Throw out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth"* (Matthew 25:30)?

What if, even in a spiritual hospital bed, one can flex their faith to pray for others, forgive others, encourage others, plan how they can help others, and seek Jesus' ways for themselves and others? What if even this level of "fitness" is enough for one talent but can lead to more healing and more works of faith that will eventually bring *"His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master'"* (Matthew 25:21,23)?

Perception 4
Holiness (Diet) and Righteousness (Exercise)

What if diet and exercise were two different things but overlapped in their effect on health? What if diet dictated the purity of nutrition and energy available for the body while exercise increased blood flow, with all its benefits, and promoted fitness or strength by increasing the endurance of muscles, tendons, ligaments, and bones? What if diet and exercise also overlapped in cleansing, healing, and maintaining the body? What if they had detoxifying effects, cleared metabolic waste, created and maintained good physiological environments, and brought in healing components (immune repair mechanisms)?

What if, however, a great diet could not make up for the absence of physical activity, and exercise could not overcome a very poor diet? What if eating too much and eating bad food, all the time, had a damaging effect on the body, and exercise did little to counteract that because the body was always stressed in trying to detoxify itself and repair fat-damaged or sugar-damaged tissues? What if, over time, those things decreased the body's processes for maintenance and defense against infectious diseases or aberrant cancer cells?

What if diet and exercise were analogous to our spiritual walk with God? What if a *spiritual diet* was how "set apart" we are from the world's candy (lust of the

world, flesh, and boastful pride of life) and our flesh's desire for it? What if this were called *holiness*? What if holiness involved the purity of what we watched (or just didn't watch), what our hopes and dreams were, and which spiritual inputs we clung to: the impulses of the flesh or the guidance of the Holy Spirit? What if, in comparison, *spiritual exercise* was called *righteousness* and were the acts, good works, good deeds, and efforts to do the things that Jesus taught and commanded, and was the purpose of the Holy Spirit living through us? What if righteousness were *"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them"* (Ephesians 2:10)? What if righteousness included any interactions done with others to forgive them, extend mercy, turn the other cheek, seek the last place, confess Jesus, bear other's burdens, and take care of *"the least of these My brethren"* (Matthew 25:40b)? What if it was part of the "Great Commission" (that has since become the "Great Omission"): *"teaching them to observe all that I commanded you"* (Matthew 28:20b)? What if holiness and righteousness lived through us were also overlapping to provide real spiritual health to prepare us for eternity?

Perception 5
Character and Conduct

What if, for overall physical health, the body's "character" could be defined as "you are what you eat," and the body's "conduct" was defined as "be more, do more," and "it never gets easier, you just get stronger"? What if, in general, the body's *character* was internal integrity while the body's *conduct* was for external effect?

What if the reduction of one affected the other? What if no serious triathlete goes on a night of debauchery before a triathlon? What if any serious athlete is concerned about what they eat because they know that poor performance goes with poor eating habits? What if, conversely, lack of exercise or movement causes muscle atrophy and poor circulation of important nutrients, immune components, and waste clearance that no diet is going to change? What if, even though different but overlapping, pursuing diet and exercise as much as possible on any given day is not without value?

What if this is true of our spiritual character (holiness) and spiritual conduct (righteousness)? What if both are necessary for a thriving spiritual life and a life that is in God's will? What if one affects the other? What if, for example, our spiritual clothing wasn't a "metaphoric" covering of Jesus or His blood, but was frequently referred to as linen or clothing representing the

deeds, works, and righteousness (conduct) of the saints? What if *"It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints"* (Revelation 19:8)? What if Jesus related being dressed appropriately for His wedding feast as those who were "good" and were not living for themselves (Matthew 22:1-14)? What if He told the Laodicean church that they were naked because their "deeds" were lukewarm and lacking, and He warned them to change that by expending themselves to buy those things from Him? What if church precepts say that all good works are like filthy rags based on Isaiah 64? What if these precepts are skewed because it is not the righteous deeds which are filthy but the sin, unholiness, and evil character that they did *"for a long time"* (v. 5,6)? What if the "filthy rags" passage is about Israel, who has left the ways of the Lord, rather than churchy precepts that negate Jesus' teachings and commandments to just "get saved" without accountability for their character and conduct? What if character certainly affects conduct and conduct certainly affects character, and they have eternal outcomes as long as God gives us breath?

Perception 6
How Much Exercise and Fitness?

What if the answer is not “it depends” or “it’s complicated” because the correct answers are – never enough and never too little? What if “it depends” and “it’s complicated” always leave room for not wanting to do it and seeking excuses rather than perseverance? What if “never enough” and “never too little” reflect a constant desire for exercise and fitness in one’s life, no matter the condition or situation, and this mindset perseveres at whatever level one is able? What if the mottos: “be more, do more” and “it never gets easier, you just get stronger” will take care of all the in-betweens? What if they always work, whether training for a competition, personal workouts, coming back from injury or illness, or even just flexing or stretching the feet and hands (or whatever) while going through or recovering from injury or illness? What if, even in hospitals, this attitude will get one to stand up and take small steps after a surgery or in using an incentive spirometer to strengthen the lungs? What if one knows that’s “never too little” so that, later, they can look forward to “it’s never enough”?

What if “don’t quit quitting” is the most important attitude of exercise and fitness because it represents flexible perseverance that keeps goals and hopes alive regardless of setbacks? What if the perseverance is, itself,

the hope and reward because giving up or forgetting about it is really the path of decline, defeat, and death?

What if setbacks, throughout life, were inevitable and just part of having a life? What if exercise-induced fatigue, strains, and injuries are just part of exercise and need to be constantly managed as much as the workout routines need to be managed? What if sometimes one needs to take a day (or days) off, or walk rather than run? What if those things aren't excuses but annoyances that one must be disciplined about and then keep going? What if there is always stiffness and soreness as "it never gets easier; you just get stronger"?

What if the spiritual exercise and fitness of Jesus' righteousness living through us to God and others is the same? What if it's never enough and never too little? What if there's never any reason for boasting (as so many use that excuse to not do anything) because Jesus is the standard to which any Christian excels, and well, there's never any reason for boasting? What if it's never enough because His perfection is our standard, and He called every Christian to it? What if that perfection meant to finally die for the Lord, and who's going to boast in that and who's going to applaud that? What if, at the never enough level, there was *"Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends if you do what I command you"* (John 15:13-14)? What if, at the never too little lever, there was *"For he who is not against us is for us. For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because of your name as followers of Christ, truly I say to you, he will not lose his reward"* (Mark 9:40-41) and *"If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?"* (Matthew 5:47)? What if, like exercise, perseverance at any level is the greatest true saving faith?

Perception 7
Goals and Hopes

What if any kind of health requires goals with the hope of reaching those goals? What if diet requires goals with hope, and exercise does too? What if you could imagine health without goals or hope? What if that would create no reason to do it? What if the doctor said, "You don't need to worry about your weight, diet, and fitness because I know you'll be great no matter what"? What if they said, "I declare you healthy and, even if something comes up, we can fix it"? What if that's ridiculous since the point of health is to establish goals with the hope of progressing in them to stay healthy, no matter what the circumstances, throughout one's whole life?

What if, once having established goals and hopes, the name of the game became perseverance to either continue in them, to get back on track for them, or to fight the feelings of discouragement, distraction, or defeat to get back on track for them? What if not doing those things is a consignment to degenerating health with all its suffering and potential premature death? What if there was still degenerating health because one gets old and slow or because of illness or injury, but the goals and their hopes remain at any health level to provide purpose and accomplishment?

What if, likewise, there were spiritual goals with hope in living for God that were just as important and just as expected as being "born again"? What if this is just part of being spiritually healthy and spiritually alive? What if Jesus laid out those goals and hopes in all His teaching, commandments, warnings, and judgments, taken literally and personally? What if the complacency through "once saved, always saved," "God loves you just the way you are," "salvation is a finished work," "don't strive so hard (if at all)," etc., were deceptions that negated real faith in Jesus narrow path of spiritual life and diverted faith to modern church doctrines? What if, like the fictitious doctor above, Jesus said, "You don't need to worry about your spiritual state because I've paid the price in full, and that's because I love you and adore you no matter what"? What if He said, "I declare you sin-free, and in My care, even if something comes up, it's all fixed by grace"? What if, according to the real Jesus, however, that's ridiculous since the whole point of His saving us was to glorify His Father through His righteousness and holiness living through us by the Holy Spirit when we follow, literally and personally, His red-letter teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments? What if He said that perseverance in this, together with Him forgiving and cleansing our sins, with the Holy Spirit giving power and comfort, with our fellowship with Him in all suffering and trials, and with His preservation, is true faith and true life in Him that will see victory now and sharing in His glory through eternity?

Perception 8

Fitness Goals with Hope

What if the worst setbacks in fitness aren't the hindrances themselves but the mentality of giving up on any goals with hope because past attempts didn't go the way or have the effect you hoped for? What if abandoning the goals with hope is the real problem? What if the level of fitness goals with hope must be on a continuum to match a person's needs on any given day throughout life? What if the goals could be amazing and glorious over the past three months, but then suddenly reduce to just getting strong enough to go to the bathroom on your own? What if a flexible mentality about the time to complete goals is just as important as the goals? What if, for instance, bodybuilding or running were a lifetime pursuit, but a broken bone took eight weeks to heal? What if, after healing, it took another month or two to regain weightlifting or running? What if weight loss might take years, but amazing things could still happen each day by changing the diet, reducing calories, and moving or walking? What if these examples demonstrate the need for a continuum of goals and a very flexible, one-day-at-a-time mindset? What if flexibility allowed one to reset new hopes, for example, to the bathroom on their own, start moving and flexing their injury or strain, or just think clearly again after a cold?

What if, spiritually, we realized that Jesus' "finished work" on the cross was to call us to continue the work of His body on earth? What if we had spiritual eyes to see His narrow path of life and spiritual ears to hear His teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments on how to do that? What if we believed that *"To one he gave five talents, to another, two, and to another, one, each according to his own ability; and he went on his journey"* (Matthew 25:15)? What if the talents were skills, capacities, gifts, and the opportunities to use them according to His teachings and commandments? What if the talents varied for each Christian, *"each according to his own ability"*?

What if, similar to the mental "flexibility" of goals and hopes required for physical exercise and fitness, a Christian must set their goals and hopes on Jesus' teachings and His call to glorify God through them? What if each must assess their own "abilities" given by the Lord and then be willing to be flexible to persevere in them through all of life's ups and downs? What if sometimes there will be confessing Jesus, testifying to what He's done for you, and helping those in need? What if His teachings and commandments are always there, but He changes the people, opportunities, and capabilities?

What if the early church experienced drastic changes in their environment and nation (including a diaspora), but perseverance in the mission was still the same: *"the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked"* (1 John 2:6)?

Perception 9
Not a Fan

What if the purpose of life was to discover the real game of life and then to play in it? What if life were like playing football, and there were different levels of playing football, from professional to college to high school to little league to even backyard football and backyard catch? What if a lot of people watched professional and college football, fewer watched high school and little league football, and almost nobody ordered a pizza to watch kids play catch in the backyard?

What if everyone's life was a "game of life" that had to be learned, practiced, performed, and persevered through – to be better learned, practiced, performed, and persevered through? What if one could not simply be a fan of their own lives who sat in the stands and cheered themselves on or cried when it wasn't going so well? What if the Christian life were the same way, where one couldn't just sit in the stands, or it wasn't really the Christian life?

What if church theology, doctrines, and Bible interpretations have steered the Christian life to just being a fan in the stands who had sufficient knowledge about the game so that their hearts could be in it to cheer or cry when appropriate? What if some church theology says that actual playing is a specific calling, otherwise you're not accountable to play in the game because you're a sinner

and were saved to just wait on God and watch Him work? What if, even though you're "a sinner," you're still "a winner" because "when God sees you, He doesn't see you but Jesus covering you in His victory"? What if church theology says that the Christian life is having faith in these things that no longer require the work to go play in the game? What if it says that Jesus already played the game and He had the victory, so Christians don't have to? What if Christians are to just "ride the coattails of Jesus"?

What if that type of faith was based on church theology, doctrines, and Bible interpretations rather than Jesus' red-letter teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments? What if, over a long time, the "fans" redefined Christianity according to "black letter" interpretations apart from "red-letter" definitions of the "Head Coach"? What if, for instance, a fan uses "faith *not* works" to get out of being a follower with "faith *by* works"?

What if Jesus gave us the works of "faith by works" in His teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments? What if He rerouted His whole written law into His "law of love": how to love God with everything and how to love one's neighbor as oneself?

What if the differentiation of a "follower" or a "fan" will be made at His judgment by one's faith to hear and act on His words or to hear and not act? What if those "following" will hear *"well done good and faithful…",* while those who are "only fans" will hear *"I never knew you"*? What if the latter was followed by *"DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS"*? What if *"I never knew you"* was preceded by *"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter"* (Matthew 7:21)?

What if the *"I never knew you"* was at the end of His three chapter, red-letter "Sermon on the Mount" on how to know Him, and His specific definition of "follower" is *"Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them…"* (Matthew 7:24a) or "only fans" is *"Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them…"* (Matthew 7:26a)?

What if the game plan of the "Head Coach" includes:

- *"For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions"* (Matthew 6:14-15)
- *"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy"* (Matthew 5:7)
- *"But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also"* (Matthew 5:39)
- *"But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous"* (Matthew 5:44-45)
- *"But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you"* (Matthew 6:3-4)
- *"but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart"* (Matthew 5:28)

- *"If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell"* (Matthew 5:29)
- *"But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him!"* (Luke 12:5)

Perception 10
A Player, Not a Fan

What if the Head Coach were standing in front of 100k fans trying to coach them with the specific game plays and reminders of what each player's position is supposed to do? What if He was preparing them because He expected them to get up at any second to play the game? What if 100k people just stared at Him and couldn't understand what He was saying because it didn't apply to them since they were just there to enjoy the game and cheer for the right team?

What if He just kept trying to coach them on all the work they need to do and the mindsets they need to have to be on both offense and defense in the game? What if He said these things are conditional, and if you don't do them, then you will lose the game, not because you did them poorly, but because you were never interested in doing them at all? What if 100k people just stared at Him and couldn't understand what He was saying because it didn't apply to them since they were just there to enjoy the game and cheer for the right team?

What if this eventually upset some fans, who were told they didn't have to be players because He'd already played the game and won? What if they reminded Jesus, the Head Coach, that "God's grace" and freedom allow us to choose to be a fan and that God loves us just the way

we are? What if they said being a fan was "worship" and that's what they were there for and what they came every week for? What if they didn't like Him expecting more than that, and then implying that their worship was empty lip service, even though they really made an effort at it?

What if He said that He'd wait for them to respond, and just continued to coach about the need to forgive others to be forgiven, seek the last place, not covet, become like a child, not to think of anyone as "an idiot," fight lust and impure thoughts, show mercy to receive it, take care of "the least of these," not repay evil with evil, turn the other cheek, and lose one's life in all these things to gain it in Him? What if He said, "That's how the game is played"? What if the fans just sang and prayed *"*[we] *are rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing"* (Revelation 3:17a) because of your forgiveness and grace? What if you have already made us sinners to be winners in God's eyes, and we don't need to play because the things you're saying are crazy hard, filthy rags, and an insult to your "finished work"? What if He said that He wouldn't wait indefinitely and warned, *"I know your deeds…" "So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth"* (Revelation 3:15a, 16), *"and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked"* (Revelation 3:17b), and *"I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see"* (Revelation 3:18)?

What if part of His warning was *"Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me"* (Revelation 3:20)? What if this verse had

nothing to do with letting Jesus into your heart to get saved, but was part of His warning to the church to get saved from being spewed out of His mouth because of their apathy to working to have His holiness and righteousness lived through them? What if He said, *"Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent"* (Revelation 3:19) with the condition of *"He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne"* (Revelation 3:21)? What if He's still speaking to fans who don't seem to understand Him but He concludes *"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches"* (Revelation 3:22)?

Perception 11
On the Field, Not in the Stands

What if, throughout history, there have been many "players" who have followed their Head Coach in how He says to play the game and followed Him to wherever He said the game was to be played? What if these games consisted of bringing His word (His gospel and teachings) and His deeds (His "Good Samaritan" and the "least of these" commandments) all over the world and to its remotest parts? What if thousands, if not millions, have done this through the centuries?

What if some of these people have been founders or great players in various church movements? What if the founders and great players had been exemplified and remembered in biographies, teachings, and role models to the church? What if, however, they became like head coaches to their movement, displacing the only real Head Coach, Jesus, so that His words and His ways were forgotten or ignored for the sake of the movement? What if Jesus said, *"Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they?"* (Matthew 7:15-16)? What if Jesus warning was not for us to pass judgment on them but to follow Him rather than them so that we will bear good fruit in the way He

said to? What if Jesus also defined these leaders with, *"But many who are first will be last; and the last, first"* (Matthew 19:30), and *"If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all"* (Mark 9:35), and *"Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ. But the greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted"* (Matthew 23:10-12)?

What if His teachings and commandments were humbling, humiliating, and self-denying? What if they were *"Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for their fathers used to treat the false prophets in the same way. But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also; and whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either. Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back"* (Luke 6:26-30)?

What if getting out of the stands to be a player would mostly look like the incongruous waterboy on the sidelines in *"For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because of your name as followers of Christ, truly I say to you, he will not lose his reward"* (Mark 9:41) and *"If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?"* (Matthew 5:47) and *"do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation"* (Romans 12:16b) and *"Now in Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha…; this woman was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity which she continually did"* (Acts 9:36)?

Perception 12
The Unhealth of Fitness

What if, for the sake of argument, exercise seemed to make one worse than better? What if it increased daily soreness, aches, pains, and strains? What if it seemed to only increase one's appetite and make it harder to diet? What if these things were mistakenly associated with poor health and added to the fear of poor health that one was supposedly trying to alleviate through exercise?

What if exercise constantly leads to modifying the workout to address strains? What if the strains consistently hindered progress toward fitness goals? What if one had to take more days off? What if it made one realize they were getting older (or old) and that, instead of seeing progress increase, they would have to face a slow decrease in their maintenance? What if they realize they are never going to routinely bench press 225 lbs. or more and must lower the weight, and then lower it, and then lower it, and maybe just concentrate more on bench pressing with dumbbells? What if all that's ok because any consistent exercise still makes one "pumped" both physically, mentally, and emotionally? What if, no matter what level of effort, weight, or endurance, exercise is an *outlet* for oneself to change their *outlook* on life? What if one just had to keep reminding themselves that soreness and obstacles were just part of the process and any "perceived"

setback was better than actual immobility? What if any level of exercise, even hand grips or foot flexing, was physically, mentally, and emotionally beneficial?

What if spiritual fitness was the same – to fight the good fight to not covet, stay holy, forgive others, bear other's burdens, consider other's as more important than oneself, seek the last place, confess Jesus everywhere, take care of "the least of these," and not think of someone as an "idiot" – also brought with it bumps, bruises, and soreness from the self-emptying? What if this were the "perseverance" and endurance part of the Christian life? What if the New Testament is full of these teachings with encouragement to keep going? What if, for instance, there was *"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary"* (Galatians 6:7-9) and *"But the seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance"* (Luke 8:15) and *"Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison"* (2 Corinthians 4:16-17)?

What if following Jesus' self-emptying, life-losing, humbling, and often humiliating teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments did require a lifetime of perseverance but also gave one the true *"rest for your souls"* with the condition of *"Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS"*

(Matthew 11:29)? What if becoming “fit” and being “fit” for God’s kingdom was the only way to live with purpose in everything, and was the spiritual “pump” for everything physical, mental, and emotional no matter what level or circumstance and was the only *outlet* to change one’s *outlook* on life? What if one just had to keep reminding themselves that the humility and obstacles were just part of the process, and any “perceived” setback was better than actual immobility? What if any level of spiritual exercise of following Jesus’ teachings and commandments was physically, mentally, and emotionally beneficial?

Perception 13
Failure to Thrive

What if "failure to thrive" were a medical phrase used to describe inadequate weight gain for babies and toddlers who have trouble getting enough nutrients? What if, analogously, that also applied to adults for weight gain, poor health, or decreased physical fitness due to the type or amount of nutrients ingested? What if there were many other ingredients needed to thrive in life, that without them or with too much of them, would lead to a failure to thrive in physical, emotional, mental, or social fitness? What if people would say, inadvertently, that they experience "failure to thrive" by being stuck in a rut, a victim of circumstance, left behind, out of date, a has-been, a born loser, ignored, overlooked, unappreciated, or forgotten?

What if the "ingredients" necessary to thrive in life have been continuously offered by the world since birth? What if there were constant education of these ingredients through family, school, TV, advertisements, social media, and jobs? What if, however, it is ultimately God who gives life, the number of days for each life, and all good things to all people on the earth? What if learning to live in the world is fine if it doesn't conflict with God's ways? What if the church also provides the ingredients to thrive both spiritually and in our temporal vessels? What if they look to the Bible for these ingredients and find many

encouraging passages about what God has done for us, and that it's not really about what we do, but about what's been done for us, and that we just need to have faith and believe it? What if the world's "ingredients" are made clean by faith in God, and we are free to live and be ourselves? What if, even if we are "stuck in a rut," we can still enjoy life to the best of our ability and appreciate the smaller things of TV, movies, social media, or gaming? What if it doesn't matter if we are a victim of circumstance, left behind, out of date, a has-been, a write-off, a born loser, ignored, overlooked, unappreciated, or forgotten because that's just the opinions of other people (who are mostly toxic) and we are our own person and the "Person in Charge" of our own lives?

What if Jesus had a different "ingredient" that He lived on during His ministry on earth? What if it were *"My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work"* (John 4:34)? What if people normally think of *food* as ingested nutrients and *work* as what the food allows them to do? What if Jesus, however, is saying that doing the works of God is His food, diet, sustenance, and energy? What if the outcome of this type of food is not more work but God's glory? What if the temporal life on earth is a vicious cycle that eventually ends in death, but a life serving, working, and living for God according to His Son's teachings and examples is a linear path that glorifies God and allows us to share in His glory? What if there is no "failure to thrive" in this path because even failure via being "a victim of circumstance, left behind, out of date, a has-been, a write-off, a born loser, ignored, overlooked, unappreciated, or forgotten" has a purpose and eternity when following Jesus?

Perception 14
Work to Thrive

What if Jesus is saying, *"Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me"* (Revelation 3:20)? What if that has nothing to do with people opening the door of their hearts to allow Him in and "get saved"? What if this is His conclusion of an entire letter to the Laodicean Church that He is severely warning to wake up about their ideas of "works and deeds" and what they think it is to be a Christian? What if the modern church has become like the Laodicean Church with very few who *"hears My voice"* because its doctrines say, *"I am rich* [in His grace]*, and have become wealthy* [a "kept" child waiting to be crowned]*, and have need of nothing"*? What if Jesus, however, is still warning, *"you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked"* (Revelation 3:17)?

What if "thriving" in the Christian life had to start with realizing that Jesus is knocking at the door to the modern church for anyone who can still hear His voice to open the door, let Him in, and dine with Him? What if the door is shut because church doctrines and precepts put signs on the door that say you are eternally secure and unconditionally loved? What if opening the door to dine with Jesus, however, is Jesus' body (the church) that

continues to serve His food which is *"My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work"* (John 4:34)? What if this will be repentance of a "lukewarm" attitude toward "deeds" of holiness and righteousness and the eventual spewing from His mouth (Revelation 3:14-16)?

What if Jesus is *"the bread that came down out of heaven"* (John 6:41b) and consuming that bread was done by believing in Him, not just as the propitiation for sin and being born again, but believing everything He said as the only path of true temporal and eternal life? What if believing only His propitiations for sins makes Him a doormat to heaven, while believing all that He said to live it out was following the *"first born of many brethren"* and made us true children of God?

What if it was "work to thrive" to believe Jesus? What if it weren't passive but difficult? What if we must forgive others to be forgiven, and that was humiliating, self-emptying, and self-sacrificing? What if His mercy had conditions like *"Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy"*? What if He said we must seek the last place in society and become like a servant, even a slave, to bear others' burdens and be a blessing to them? What if we are to love those who do not love us and even our enemies? What if we are not to resist an evil person but to turn the other cheek after being verbally or even physically slapped, go another mile after being forced to go one, and to also give our coat to those who want our shirt (Matthew 5:38-42)? What if He said we must confess Him to a world that hates Him for Him to confess us to His Father?

What if spiritually and physically "thriving" by believing Jesus' teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments was way harder than just believing in Him for His propitiation of sins and unconditional blessings?

Perception 15
Small Steps

What if working out was "work" and the mind and body didn't automatically want to do it? What if daily fatigue, worry, or doubt made one want to relax and unwind rather than to use up more energy?

What if, in lifting weights, one had to get the mind involved by first visualizing the different lifts one was going to do and then even mimic the motions with one's arms or legs? What if this small mental exercise helped the mind remember how good it feels to get into the rhythm of reps and sets and to get pumped? What if there is muscle memory, but also mental muscle memory? What if another trick was to go and just do one warm-up set to get the blood moving? What if this were more mentally manageable and physically easy, but you are just trying to fool yourself into doing more sets after that warmup? What if it worked? What if you were only able to do 1-2 warmup sets because of injury or illness, but it sparked your determination to repeat that tomorrow and slowly do more? What if, while walking or jogging, one had to mentally picture the route they planned to take, the smooth motion of going through it, and the feeling of satisfaction after completing it? What if one even had to walk or jog slowly around the house to get the blood moving and the mind working? What if it worked?

What if this was taken to even smaller steps after being sick or injured, and even the smallest motions could help, like repeatedly flexing a hand or arm, or a foot and a leg? What if just standing up or a small walk in or around the house every 1 or 2 hours helped? What if these small, willful efforts could then be slowly increased over the days and weeks as the body healed?

What if life were just like this, and one had to keep going back to "small steps" in order to take sequentially bigger ones that would likely, again, be reduced to smaller ones to keep continuing the cycle? What if that was just great, since the alternative was a slow physical, mental, and emotional decline?

What if there were spiritual muscles that had to be worked in the same way? What if Christians weren't saved to go into "a hospital for sinners" but to work in God's fields, sowing seeds of His teachings and works; on His fishing boats, casting nets of for salvation; pulling His plow, yoked to Jesus to learn how He does it and to find rest; and engage in spiritual warfare by all His teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments? What if flexing spiritual muscles included great things and very small things, and we are always called to "do some things"? What if this was the warning in the Talents Parable for "burying one's talent"?

What if being in a "hospital for sinners" was already deciding not to flex any spiritual muscles, even though Jesus forgives us and heals us to do just that? What if a "hospital for sinners" was really more of a "hospice for sinners" waiting to die from spiritual neglect?

Perception 16
Hospital for Sinners

What if Jesus never said, "your sins are forgiven, now go into the hospital for sinners until you can love yourself enough to love others, forgive yourself so you can forgive others, or take care of yourself first so you can take care of others"? What if "a hospital for sinners" was the opposite of what Jesus taught about how to live a Christian life and what was expected for that life? What if the whole idea negated Jesus' death and resurrection, which was to forgive sin, so that we could become spiritually alive to serve God and live the life that He had for us?

What if *"Jesus answered and said to them, 'It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick'"* (Luke 5:31) but He continued with *"I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance"* (Luke 5:32)? What if "repentance from sin" is the healing rather than the coddling of the sinner who suffers because of unrepentant sin? What if, elsewhere, Jesus says, *"But go and learn what this means: 'I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT SACRIFICE,' for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners"* (Matthew 9:13), and we learn that He is referring to Hosea 6 when He spoke of the horrendous sins of Isreal and His severe judgments, not for the purpose of destroying but for their repentance and return to Him.

What if, in the passage above, calling the sick rather than the righteous, He forgave a paralytic so that he could get up and walk rather than continue to be sick (Matthew 9:5-6)? What if, in the passage below, calling the sick rather than the righteous, He uses new and old wineskins as an analogy to start a new life from repentance of sin and healing? What if "repentance of sin" is more than just stopping this or that, but is a new life that does not love or hope in the world or use the world as a pacifier? What if real life becomes about living in the Spirit of God rather than the "law of sin" in the flesh? What if pursuing Jesus' holiness and righteousness brings ongoing physical, mental, emotional, and social healing?

What if, for instance, believing Jesus when He says *"For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions"* (Matthew 6:14-15) brought healing? What if it removed a lifetime of bitterness toward others, which healed the body and mental and emotional issues, and brought peace into relationships? What if relationships became different even if others didn't change at all because one now had the light and peace of Jesus, and their hurts bounced off from forgiveness and living for the kingdom of heaven rather than this life? What if others were also affected by one's light and peace of Jesus and they had more peace but didn't know why?

What if there is no "hospital for sinners" because Jesus has forgiven the repentant? What if Jesus' red-letters at church are spiritual outpatient physical and occupational therapy to become more functional in spiritual warfare for oneself and one's surroundings – for the purpose of peace, mercy, compassion, light to the surrounding world – for their forgiveness and repentance?

Perception 17
"Times of Refreshing"

What if a consistent exercise routine also required periods of rest for the body to recover from muscle fatigue, injury, and growth? What if an occasional day off, or even a week off, made the body stronger when exercise is consistently done? What if, however, it also seemed like rest could produce its own muscle stiffness and aches? What if it seemed like there were new pains or more acute pains compared to steady workouts? What if consistent exercise produced consistently increased blood flow to joints with a low-level "pump" that acted as a type of lubricant to mask aches?

What if, regardless, rest periods were nice to not be generally sore all the time? What if, however, they were also a liability, since the idea of not working out to rest more became enticing? What if this led to difficulty in restarting exercise? What if this led to just giving up on exercise for weeks, months, years, or life? What if the only way to counteract the danger from rest and recovery leading to lethargy was to remember and visualize the real danger of giving up, and to train oneself to enjoy getting back at it rather than succumb to time off? What if training oneself for this was not only important for rest periods but also necessary to get over injuries, illnesses, or life circumstances that routinely interrupt exercise?

What if, spiritually, pursuing the Christian life is similar? What if a life of pursuing self must become a life pursuing the Lord in *"Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord"* (Acts 3:19)? What if Christianity was supposed to be "repenting" from an old way of life – in living for oneself, family, and career, and loving the world and its pleasures? What if "repent and return" means in the pursuit of holiness and living according to Jesus' definition of righteousness that includes forgiving others, showing mercy, being a peacemaker, seeking the last place, bearing others' burdens, and loving those who do not love you? What if this life goes against the very nature of the "self," the "old-self," or the "old man"? What if *"For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please"* (Galatians 5:17)? What if it was what Jesus said in *"If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate…even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it?"* (Luke 14:26-28)?

What if the Christian life was the most complete life one could have because it was true life, but what if it was also supposed to be *"Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God"* (Act 14:22b) to share in the fellowship of Jesus' suffering? What if this is part of sharing His yoke, His cross, and following Him? What if, however, this is where all His promises of peace, joy, and rest are found? What if we find that *"times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord"*?

What if these times are always important, and He will renew our strength as we take up our cross, daily, to walk in His ways to lose our lives in Him to gain them from Him? What if, however, we still have our "old nature" that really likes "rest" and "self" rather than Jesus' "works" and "self-denial"? What if it constantly tugs us to keep going with rest, or get more rest, or take a break, or agrees with "take care of yourself first in order to take care of others," or "you've been saved by grace not by works," or "God loves me just the way I am" or "I don't need to prove anything to Him"? What if the "flesh" is real and over time the *"precepts of men"* (Mark 7:7-8) and *"doctrines of demons"* (1 Timothy 4:1) have catered more to the "flesh and rest" than to Jesus' teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments that He said are true faith in Him? What if He said, *"My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples"* (John 15:8)?

What if His way is a covenant of "sacrificial love," rather than a one-sided "unconditional love"? What if it is the pursuit of His perfection that matters, regardless of how imperfectly, because that's what the cross really makes us free to do? What if a plethora of blessings, provisions, rest, and refreshing awaited God's children who follow Jesus as the *"firstborn among many brethren"*?

What if the only way to counteract the danger of rest and recovery that leads to lethargy, complacency, and apathy was to follow Jesus' red-letters literally and personally? What if one had to always visualize the real danger of giving up, and to make oneself look more to getting back at it than enjoying the time off?

Perception 18
Discipline vs. Disciplined

What if people came up with the sayings of "no pain, no gain" or "you must pick your pain"? What if a lifetime of exercise was necessary to maintain a level of health, but that was way better than a lifetime yielding the problems of no exercise? What if even stretching, flexing, and walking each day was better than nothing? What if those smaller things led to more and different exercises and a life with consistent exercise? What if strength and flexibility increased, and bones became less brittle? What if circulation improved, lessened, or stabilized the body weight, and reduced the potential for circulatory or infectious diseases?

What if exercise were a pain in the butt to do each day because it is? What if some days were more tiring, stressful, or full of obstacles? What if those things made exercise seem to be not as important? What if those days certainly happen, but the real problem affects motivation for the next day's exercise, and the next, and the next? What if each day off created a "pothole" in discipline that only got bigger the more days that were missed? What if the pothole, however, was really just the mental and physical discipline necessary to get started again and keep going? What if discipline was "a pain" that had to occur throughout life to fill in the potholes, but, with experience,

one found that the potholes could be filled in with just one set or outing of exercise?

What if "discipline" were one of two "pains" that had to be dealt with through life? What if the second pain was illness or injury? What if these occurred, sometimes, through neglect of the first pain of discipline? What if, for example, one seemed to get monstrous, 8-week "colds" (bronchitis) every year throughout life while not exercising consistently, but those episodes disappeared or became infrequent and very manageable 1-week colds when exercising consistently? What if the same thing seemed to happen with faster healing of sprains, strains, and other injuries? What if this happened even though one still had the same asthma and high blood pressure problems they had in their younger days? What if that, alone, is a great motivator to keep filling in the potholes when they occur? What if the idea of filling in the pothole seems horrible, but a trick is to just do one or two warm-up sets, or just walk to the corner and back? What if this inevitably leads to more sets and consecutive days of exercise? What if small walks inevitably turn into longer walks, and then into hikes through the woods?

What if, above, the two choices of pain are discipline or regret, but, for the Christian, the choices are discipline (in effort), discipline (to learn), or being disciplined (trained by reproof)? What if, for the Christian, it is important to know that each of these "disciplines" occurs individually but also overlaps in effect? What if, for example, being disciplined (reproof) by God still takes discipline (willful effort) to go through, and one certainly learns from it? What if we are regularly told in the New Testament to "discipline ourselves" in the ways of Jesus' teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments, and that we are meant to be yoked to Jesus, learning His ways,

as a lifelong discipline (learning)? What if one of the most important warnings and blessing of Jesus is that *"Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent"* (Revelation 3:19)? What if there is a ton of teaching in the New Testament on discipline in effort, learning, and reproof but many cannot see it because the church has established many precepts against it such as "God doesn't allow Christian suffering and wants us to have an abundant life that is to be enjoyed"?

What if Jesus endured many trials and hardships throughout His life and ministry, other than the cross? What if He said, *"You are those who have stood by Me in My trials"* (Luke 22:28)? What if, however, He never sinned and therefore never required the discipline (reproof) of His heavenly Father? What if, however, *"Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered"* (Hebrews 5:8)? What if suffering is part of this life and God's plan for each person? What if, like the discipline of physical training, we strove to take the "first pain" of disciplining ourselves according to our spiritual Head-Coach's red-letter, self-denying, life-losing teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments so as to be ready for when *"the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock* [these red-letter, self-denying words of Mine]*"* (Matthew 7:25)?

Perception 19
Success Is in the Details

What if someone wanting to walk, jog, or run to get in aerobic shape needed to think about their technique? What if, for jogging or running, one needed to make sure they stood up straight rather than slightly bent over? What if this improved air intake? What if they needed to keep their head up and eyes ahead (while still glancing at the terrain for their feet)? What if they needed to keep their shoulders and arms relaxed, with their arms bent loosely at their sides rather than tensed up? What if even the hands should be in loose, rather than tight, fists? What if the arms might work a little harder going up hills, but otherwise remain relaxed? What if these principles are important for jogging or running at a distance? What if, however, short sprints, intervals, or stair training are going to be different because the torso needs to stabilize during more powerful leg movements?

What if any exercise or sport had proper form that should be followed to maximize effort and efficiency? What if one could get a personal trainer for these things, but it also helped to observe and study those who have excelled in the field? What if visualizing others should then be used to visualize oneself before, during, and after the exercise?

What if, in addition to form and technique, finding "role models" for fitness, top athletes or trainers, is just fine because the goal and end result is better physical, mental, and emotional fitness? What if one should seek to emulate the strength and fitness of those with discipline and success, regardless of how far off one is from that? What if, eventually, one would end up "owning" one's physical fitness and success?

What if these same ideas applied to spiritual growth in Jesus after being "born again"? What if we are to emulate Him as our only spiritual role model? What if this were *"Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children"* (Ephesians 5:1) and *"By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked"* (1 John 2:5b-6)? What if Jesus is the standard for all Christians, regardless of how far off one is from His perfection? What if that's what His forgiveness of our sins and grace to keep going is for?

What if this level of spiritual ambition and training is not part of the modern church with its precepts of "not perfect, just forgiven" and "saved by grace, not by works"? What if we weren't saved by our works, but being saved is to have His good works live through us? What if the purpose of the *"gift of God"* (Ephesians 2:8b) is *"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them"* (Ephesians 2:10)?

What if "success is in the details" and the details are Jesus' plethora of red-letter, self-denying teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments? What if Jesus' techniques and form are highly conditional, difficult, humbling (even humiliating), anti-flesh, anti-self, anti-promotion, and self-emptying? What if, in contrast, they

are also not burdensome, produce peace that surpasses understanding, rest for the soul, joy made complete, the only light to see through the darkness, and a rock for the storms of life? What if a sample of His details for success is:

"But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also; and whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either. Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back. Treat others the same way you want them to treat you. If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners in order to receive back the same amount. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Do not judge, and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned. Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return" (Luke 6:27-38)?

Perception 20
Spiritual Fitness

What if there was a fitness side to being spiritual? What if there are a lot of verses in the New Testament about this, but some examples from the Apostle Paul include: *"For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers"* (1 Timothy 4:10); *"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth"* (2 Timothy 2:15); *"Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock?*" (1 Corinthians 9:7); "*holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain"* (Philippians 2:16); *"for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come"* (1 Timothy 4:8); *"Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air;*

but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified" (1 Corinthians 9:24-27); *"No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier"* (2 Timothy 2:4); *"Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us"* (Hebrews 12:1); *"Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses"* (1 Timothy 6:12); *"Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus"* (2 Timothy 2:3); *"For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ"* (2 Corinthians 10:3-5); *"Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus"* (Philippians 3:13-14); *"Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things"* (Philippians 3:17-19); and *"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the*

schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm" (Ephesians 6:10-13)?

What if Paul's illustrations on the need for spiritual fitness were very tame compared to Jesus' illustrations? What if Jesus used more literal examples of spiritual life or death? What if Jesus put it: *"But Jesus said to him, 'No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God'"* (Luke 9:62); *"By your endurance you will gain your lives"* (Luke 21:19); *"Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal"* (John 6:27); *"You will be hated by all because of My name, but the one who endures to the end, he will be saved"* (Mark 13:13); *"Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword"* (Matthew 10:34); *"And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it"* (Matthew 10:38-39); *"And He was saying to them all, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels"* (Luke 9:23-26)?

What if Jesus, from His kingdom rather than earth, further warns and rebukes the churches to be spiritually ready and to be spiritually fit with: *"I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary"* (Revelation 2:2-3); *"I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God. So remember what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. Therefore if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you"* (Revelation 3:1b-3); *"I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first"* (Revelation 2:19); *"Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth"* (Revelation 3:10); and *"I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth"* (Revelation 3:15-16)?

What if Jesus further warns all the churches about their need to "overcome" with: *"To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God"* (Revelation 2:7b); *"He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death"* (Revelation 2:11b); *"To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who*

receives it" (Revelation 2:17b); *"He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS; AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AS THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE BROKEN TO PIECES, as I also have received authority from My Father; and I will give him the morning star"* (Revelation 2:26-28); *"He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels"* (Revelation 3:5); *"He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name"* (Revelation 3:12); *"He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne"* (Revelation 3:21)?

What if Jesus warned on earth and continues to warn from heaven because He wants us to prepare and be ready because *"If anyone is destined for captivity, to captivity he goes; if anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed. Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints"* (Revelation 13:10); and *"Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus. And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, 'Write, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!"' 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them'"* (Revelation 14:12-13)?

Perception 21
Deception and Delusion

What if people with high morbid obesity and a complete lack of aerobic activity still refused to make any changes to their lifestyles? What if it's as though *"They did not love their lives even though faced with death"* (Revelation 12:11)? What if, however, it was really because they loved their *lifestyle* rather than their *lives* – even though faced with death? What if they had the delusion of being protected only by "it's not going to happen to me because I'm strong or have good genes or that doesn't happen in my family"? What if they consoled themselves with, "I will get on it – tomorrow" or "I had a good day of eating less and walked some – yesterday," but it never went further? What if most people want to irrevocably cling to the lifestyle that they know? What if, today, it's deceptively called one's "comfort zone" so that they have every justification to say, "I'm good"?

What if, spiritually, it has always been easy for God's enemy to deceive the church, and deceptions to Christians were already emerging throughout the New Testament? What if it's been a long time since those were written, but those deceptions have continued throughout church history? What if most modern Christians would agree the church has been deceived throughout history and has done ridiculous, even abominable, things? What if,

however, most Christians would view the present-day church and their own individual churches as being not at all deceived and in the right? What if, however, they must realize that every Christian, throughout history, thought the same things about their church?

What if most spiritual deception and delusion occur because Christians listen to the "authority" of scripture, which is "interpreted" by leaders in the "body" of Christ? What if this is not the same as listening first to Jesus, the only authority of scripture, Who is the Living Word of which the written word is all about? What if His red-letter, self-denying teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments provide the way to think, act, and live to love God with everything and to love one's neighbors? What if they represent true saving faith in Jesus, the Savior, rather than faith in doctrines about salvation? What if the rest of the written word was then read, interpreted, and believed through Jesus' red-letter words? What if the deceptions and delusions occurred because the red-letter words were ignored and spiritual authority was given to the interpreters of popes, reformers, theologians, and church leaders? What if Jesus did give people authority, but to supplement rather than supplant Him? What if their authority was meant to consist only of their testimony, fruit-bearing, and following Him?

What if, however, people are always stuck on the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" rather than the "tree of life"? What if, although Jesus taught how to love God and one's neighbor, *"Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies"* (1 Corinthians 8:1b)

Perception 22
A Lifetime of Healing

What if starting some form of exercise resulted in some form of immediate healing to the body that was suffering from inactivity and poor circulation? What if just halting the inactivity could feel like relief? What if continuation of the exercise over days, weeks, months, and years provided further healing to the organs, bone, muscle, and skin that had slowly festered through the stagnation of inadequate blood and lymph circulation?

What if continued exercise over days, weeks, months, and years, however, undoubtedly brought its own injuries in the form of muscle fatigue, strains, and pulled tendons? What if, however, those injuries were just part of the process and had to be managed through periods of rest and recovery or a modification of the exercise, either temporarily or permanently?

What if, even though constantly exercising, other injuries or illnesses occurred that required time (days, weeks, or months) to heal? What if that, also, is just part of the process of life and, hopefully, the times are short? What if some form of exercise is still possible during those recovery times to keep blood flowing and the heart more active? What if even short times of deeper breathing could oxygenate tissues, or short times of hand flexing, or working the lower legs by flexing the feet, or squeezing

the glutes, which will also stretch the back? What if small rehab efforts, like just getting up, sitting up, or walking around the room, increased circulation, tissue oxygenation, and healing? What if it's worth starting over?

What if Jesus said that spiritual healing affects physical healing and occurs in three ways? What if they were His forgiveness of sins (Perception 23, below), following His red-letter, self-denying teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments (24), and His pruning of our lives by discipline either for not being on His narrow path to begin with or for more stability while on His narrow path and to bear more fruit (25)?

What if, before looking at those, we have to acknowledge that there's a large part of the modern church that denounces anything to do with God's involvement in suffering with sickness or injury "because He is loving and merciful and just doesn't do that and they're not part of His will"? What if, however, people are not seeing and hearing God's will in suffering that saturates the New Testament? What if it brings hope and purpose by transforming the original curses of 1) *"you will surely will die,"* and 2) *"they knew that they were naked,"* and 3) *"cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; And you will eat the plants of the field; by the sweat of your face you will eat bread, till you return to the ground"* (Genesis 3)? What if they become: 1) you will surely live, 2) cloth one's nakedness with *"It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints"* (Revelation 19:8), and 3) redirect *"by the sweat of face"* to *"Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man*

will give to you" (John 6:27a) which *"Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work'"* (John 4:34)? What if being His *"children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ"* were conditional upon *"if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him"* (Romans 8:17)? What if this is all good news because all suffering (even though insanely unpleasant from *"piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart"* Hebrews 4:12b) now has a purpose and eternal fulfillment rather than a dead-end fulfillment of just feeding oneself and living temporal lives in decaying earthen vessels?

Perception 23

A Lifetime of Healing – From Forgiveness

What if Jesus established the association of suffering with sin (and which had been established with the Israelites over thousands of years, with countless warnings)? What if Jesus, who healed thousands of people from all kinds of suffering while on earth, taught the relationship between sin, sickness, and death with *"Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, and walk'?"* (Matthew 9:5); *"Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, 'Behold, you have become well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you'"* (John 5:14); *"Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish"* (Luke 13:4-5)?

What if most Christians do not like to associate suffering with sin because they do not want to admit and align themselves as a sinner or as a continual sinner that needs Jesus' constant forgiveness and redirection on how to live? What if Jesus, who never sinned, said, *"Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone"* (Mark 10:18)? What if, even more so, we are certainly not "good"? What if, however, Christians can be cleansed of sin in their "Christian lives" with *"If we confess our sins,*

He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9)? What if, even though cleansed, we are still warned in the flanking verses in *"If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us"* (1 John 1:8) and *"If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us"* (1 John 1:10)? What if these harsh, literal warnings cause us to realize the depth of our own sin in *"whatever is not from faith is sin"* (Romans 14:23b)? What if true faith is in believing Jesus, literally and personally, and He is our standard of perfection, no matter how imperfectly we follow? What if these 1 John verses are for that?

What if the relationship between sin and death is further established in *"If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will for him give life to those who commit sin not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death; I do not say that he should make request for this. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not leading to death"* (1 John 5:16-17), and *"You have not lied to men but to God. And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last"* (Acts 5:4b-5a), and *"For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world"* (1 Corinthians 11:30-32)?

What if this latter passage is incomprehensible to "unbelievers" as well as many "believers" because of the precept "that's just not who God is"? What if most people consider that their lives are their own and that God is just there to take care of them? What if He does take care of every person who has lived in *"nor is He served by human*

hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things" (Acts 17:25)? What if, while He does that, He also says that our lives are accountable to Him since Jesus warned, *"'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?'" So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God"* (Luke 12:20-21)?

What if the point of all this is to recognize that our lives are not our own, to remember that we always have sin, and to not discount it when difficulties, trials, and suffering come to us? What if it's perfectly ok to reflect on being a sinner, judging our own behaviors, and seeking forgiveness for immediate or eventual healing? What if that's what Jesus' sacrifice and blood are for?

Perception 24
A Lifetime of Healing – From Following

What if we ate too much and didn't exercise and became morbidly obese and unfit, and our bodies began to suffer because of it? What if, however, we were still breathing and God, Who holds our lives, is waiting for us to repent of the sins of gluttony, sensuality, and greed of food and lack of physical effort because of dissipations that come from loving the world? What if, rather than repent and work at health, we were deeply moved that God could forgive us through the blood of His precious Son and simply accept this precious gift? What if it inspired us to attend church, read the Bible, pray more, and sing lots of hymns? What if, however, we didn't stop the gluttony and dissipation but kept ordering pizzas and other door deliveries and searched for new movies, new social media, or new games to play?

What if that's ok because we knew from the Bible *"So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed"* (John 8:36) and *"All things are lawful for* [us]*"*? What if, likewise, we believed in Jesus and knew that He forgave us for our sins and would keep us and never leave us? What if we recognized how much He loves us and wants the best lives for us, and *"by His stripes we are healed"*? What if we know that He loves us just the way we are and that "when God sees me, He doesn't see sinful me but

Jesus who covers me in His righteousness and holiness"? What if all this is in the Bible because *"you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God"* (1 Corinthians 6:11)? What if Jesus also said, *"You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you"* (John 15:3)?

What if, however, being forgiven, washed, and sanctified is to make us useful and functional for His holiness and righteousness? What if *"Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness"* (2 Timothy 2:19b)? What if *"Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work"* (2 Timothy 2:20-21)? What if being forgiven without repentance is not Christianity but, with repentance, Jesus' cleansing allows them to be used as *"a vessel for honor…prepared for every good work"*? What if Paul further continues, *"Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart"* (2 Timothy 2:22)?

What if continual repentance is only the first step in following Jesus for a lifetime of healing? What if Jesus said, *"I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to*

be My disciples" (John 15:5-8)? What if believing in Jesus was not just about having one's "sins forgiven," being "born again," and acquiring "eternal life" but about *"that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples"*? What if fruit-bearing required that *"My words abide in you"* because His words – His red-letter teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments – give us the specifics on how to bear fruit? What if John repeated this with, *"Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds"* (2 John 1:9-11)?

What if a lifetime of physical, mental, and emotional healing also required the red-letter, self-denying, life-losing teachings of Jesus on forgiving others, pulling up roots of bitterness, desiring mercy over judgment, seeking the last place, confessing Him in a hostile world, taking care of "the least of these," bearing other's burdens, greeting those who don't greet us, not calling or even thinking of others as "idiots," and many other teachings? What if these things changed our lives, our thoughts, and our insecurities, and we began to get healthier?

Perception 25
A Lifetime of Healing – From Discipline

What if Jesus flat-out said, *"Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect"* (Matthew 5:48)? What if Jesus is God and He actually commanded His church and God's true children to be perfect? What if it's no surprise that most "Christians" dismiss this idea?

What if Jesus said other "outrageous" things like *"I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing"* (John 15:5)? What if He also said, *"If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned"* (John 15:6)? What if there are two types of branches that "believe" in Jesus: those that accept His forgiveness of sins and repent and bear fruit according to His teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments or those that accept His forgiveness without any repentance or without following His teachings? What if the latter are dried-up branches that bear no fruit and are "thrown away" and "cast into the fire"? What if *"Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit"* (John 15:2)?

What if Jesus is serious about our perfection and He therefore disciplines those He loves with "pruning"?

What if Judas, despite being with Jesus for over three years, was non-repentant with a non-fruit-bearing heart who was a dead branch, while Peter, despite many mistakes, was repentant from the heart and sought to bear fruit for His Lord? What if Peter endured much pruning, and that pruning involved suffering?

What if, then, there is tremendous purpose in the greatest sufferings or the smallest irritations from interruptions, running late, bad weather, or stubbing a toe? What if all these things are for us to start bearing fruit, bear more fruit, or bear fruit from a pure heart dependent on God? What if suffering is met in one of two ways – either with resistance, anger, "kicking the goad," or resentfulness, or with yielding, humility, slowing down, prayer, and meditation? What if either of these ways is way better than spiritual lukewarmness, where "God has nothing to do with suffering except to deliver us out of it"? What if a lifetime of spiritual, internal healing occurs through the things that our flesh hates to go through?

What if daily pruning isn't meant to be easy and is part of what Jesus said in *"He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it"* (Matthew 10:39)? What if, however, there is the promise that *"we know that God causes all things to work together for good"* but must remember that it has the condition *"to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose"* (Romans 8:28)?

What if there's a ton of scripture in the New Testament on the importance of suffering, trials, endurance, and perseverance? What if here are just a few examples of "discipline:" *"But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world"* (1 Corinthians 11:32), *"For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to*

them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness" (Hebrews 12:10), *"All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness"* (Hebrews 12:11), *"For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God"* (1 Peter 2:20), *"For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps"* (1 Peter 2:21), and *"For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong"* (1 Peter 3:17)?

What if Judas is gone, but the "Prince of Pruned" summarized it with *"Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name. For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? AND IF IT IS WITH DIFFICULTY THAT THE RIGHTEOUS IS SAVED, WHAT WILL BECOME OF THE GODLESS MAN AND THE SINNER? Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right"* (1 Peter 4:15-19)? What if the King of Pruning summarized it with *"My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples"* (John 15:8)?

Perception 26
The Process of Perfection

What if, again, Jesus flat-out said, *"Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect"* (Matthew 5:48)? What if most Christians balk at this idea and much has been written against it? What if, for instance, Christians don't like the word "perfect" so they try to soften it with other possible translations of "complete," "mature," or "more perfect"? What if, however, it still reads *"Therefore you ARE to be* ["complete," "mature," or "more perfect"] *as your heavenly Father is* ["complete," "mature," or "more perfect"]? What if it's not a good idea to soften or negate Jesus' words since Jesus is the Living God, and the Living Word of God, and the Living Water and Bread of Life, and the Way, the Truth, and the Life? What if, therefore, His teachings must either be important for both temporal life and eternal life or else ignored for a made-up version of Jesus and God to whom we don't have to be accountable?

What if we recognize that reasonably good parents, teachers, family, and friends contributed to our lives and made some effort, even worked hard, for us to grow and thrive from infancy to adolescence to adulthood? What if, like many, we don't think that we owe them anything? What if, however, we strive for excellence or some level of excellence in being a parent, in careers,

in being a homeowner, or in other areas of our lives? What if there are always a variety of standards given for life that we use, consciously or unconsciously, as goals to live up to? What if that's part of becoming an adult?

What if, like most unsaved, we don't owe God anything or, like most saved, we have lots of doctrine to confirm that we can't repay Him and aren't good enough to even try? What if, however, God commands and expects His true children to owe Him everything and to seek to please Him with all of their heart, soul, mind, and strength? What if He says this because He is life, and His ways are the only perfect and fullest temporal and eternal life, and that's His love and desire for each of His children? What if He said, *"For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it"* (Luke 9:24)? What if the standard of measure for this is Jesus Himself, and all His teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments? What if these are the specifications of how it is done? What if many will say, *"Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus"* (Romans 8:1)? What if, however, being "in Christ Jesus" doesn't mean acceptance of church theology and doctrines but faith to believe Jesus in all that He said?

What if *"Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect"* (Matthew 5:48) means that we are to pursue His ways, no matter how imperfectly, for our whole lives? What if, during the process of doing so, we repent and ask forgiveness for all sins that we saw as "imperfections"? What if, after He removes all imperfections, the only thing remaining is "perfection"?

What if God provides everything we need – His forgiveness, His grace, His Holy Spirit, His power, Jesus' teachings and leading, and the good works that have been

prepared for us to do? What if, after all that, He even promises to *repay us* – which is mind-boggling? What if He says, *"For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS"* (Matthew 16:27), *"and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous"* (Luke 14:14), and *"If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward"* (1 Corinthians 3:14), and *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad"* (2 Corinthians 5:10), and *"Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done"* (Revelation 22:12)?

Perception 27
Preppers

What if, from the start, our lives are preparation for how to live more life and then more life that continues until death? What if we are always figuring out how to move forward the best way and the most "fit" way, no matter what the circumstance? What if, from the start, we are learning to feed ourselves, bathe ourselves, dress ourselves, live with others, write, take tests, earn degrees, get jobs, build families, and then support the process for the new and older generations? What if we are constantly "seeking," "striving," "looking at others to learn," "emulating," "copying," "imitating," "working," "putting up with," "avoiding," "backtracking," "fixing," "reordering," "persevering," and "enduring" throughout life to have a better, more complete, more dynamic, or more comfortable life? What if that's just life?

What if, in comparison to our physical lives, we are told that our spiritual lives must be done with all those hard things? What if, however, we have been told that we are already "saved," "complete in Christ," "sealed," "forgiven," "His finished work," "redeemed," "His heirs," "loved," "His bride," His new creation," and even "His masterpiece, pride, and joy"? What if these teachings come from cherry-picked, highlighted verses that are taken out of context from a plethora of warnings and

judgments that Jesus detailed while on earth? What if a literal and personal reading of Jesus' red-letter words totally negated a "finished work" idea in us, and that salvation did have a start but was also a process of faith proven through obedience and sanctification to His teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments? What if His sacrifice for sin allowed us the freedom to complete and finish the course He has established? What if, however, teachings that negate, ignore, or deny the process are really just the precepts of men to "tickle" ears, increase church membership, get donations, and receive praise from each other? What if it's really that bad? What if *"Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son"* (2 John 1:9)?

What if Christians are meant to utilize the forgiveness and grace given to them to lay down *their* lives in order to have more and more of *His* life? What if the Christian life is all about preparation for eternity, not just a "get out of jail free" card? What if only the "spiritual preppers" will be the ones saying, *"Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready. It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints"* (Revelation 19:7-8).

What if Jesus and the New Testament are saturated with these warnings? What if examples from Paul include: *"For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death"* (2 Corinthians 7:10) and *"So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now*

much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12)?

What if, in this life, we are to make and keep ourselves "fit" by obeying all that Jesus said on how to love God with everything and to love our neighbors as ourselves? What if we are to be spiritual preppers who prepare ourselves in the smallest and greatest ways from His teachings with His "spiritual hygiene" of forgiveness, and to cloth ourselves according to His teachings on how to be righteous because *"It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints"* (Revelation 19:7-8)? What if, like physical life, we are to constantly "seek," "strive," "look to Jesus to learn," "emulate Him," "copy Him," "imitate Him," "do the good works He's prepared for us," "putting up with this physical life," "avoid the world and flesh," "backtrack from drifting," "fix what we've done wrong," "reorder our values," "persevere," and "endure" throughout our born-again life to have a better, more complete, more dynamic, or more intimate temporal and eternal life as His bride? What if that's just what life in Jesus is?

What if we take seriously Jesus' warning to be a "prepper" by believing *"But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw a man there who was not dressed in wedding clothes, and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?' And the man was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' For many are called, but few are chosen."* (Matthew 22:11-14)?

Perception 28
Blind Faith to See

What if one had to start exercising for a better life, but it was hard, there were many obstacles, and many reasons to put it off? What if, even after starting to exercise, there were still many obstacles and many reasons to put it off? What if the struggle for fitness was real – for one's whole life? What if exercising each day required some level of "blind faith" that it would be better than not doing it at all (with some days being easier or more motivating than others)? What if it took "blind faith" to stand against the resistance toward exercising? What if, however, the blind faith always turned into "I'm glad I did that," no matter how the workout went, and it led to an easier "blind faith" the next day and the next until one was working out because the temporary "blindness" gave way to seeing and feeling the benefits?

What if there were also mental and emotional benefits of blind faith that led to more motivation and purpose in other aspects of life? What if just doing a 15, 30, 45, or 60-minute workout most days could do all that? What if just 5, 10, or 15 minutes eventually led to more minutes, or to 60 minutes? What if, as you get older, it seems that every workout requires blind faith to just do one warm-up set, which you know will immediately dissolve the initial resistance and lead to more sets and a

full workout? What if one was "just fooling themselves" but in a good way?

What if the day's exercise always had to start with "blind faith" that went up against all mental and physical resistance to it? What if it took "blind faith" to eventually "see" the difference? What if, spiritually, many non-Christians accuse Christians of "blind faith"? What if, however, Christians are called to "witness" about *"What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life"* (1 John 1:1)? What if they're called to witness about what they have "seen" or personally experienced from "blind faith" in Jesus, God, and the Holy Spirit? What if it is "seeing" a repentant born-again experience and "seeing" the fruit of obeying Jesus' red-letter, self-denying teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments?

What if, for example, a Christian has been offended or deeply hurt by someone? What if they knew that they were supposed to forgive that person and *"not take into account a wrong suffered"* (1 Corinthians 13:5b)? What if, however, there seemed to be nothing in them that was willing to forgive at that level? What if, however, Jesus said things like *"For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions"* (Matthew 6:14-15)? What if one actually believed Jesus, literally and personally, in *"then your Father will not forgive your transgressions"*? What if believing Jesus was "blind faith" compared to church theology and doctrines that ignored or negated Jesus' words? What if one decided to forgive, anyway, because *"Whatever He says to you, do it"* (John 2:5b)?

What if, however, the blind-faith decision led to tremendous spiritual "sight" and one now became aware of what their own sin looked like to God? What if they understood the pain their own sin caused Him and the necessity of using His Son's actual blood to forgive their own sins? What if the roots of bitterness caused by the unforgiveness of others were pulled up, and one could see how God used the hurtful experiences for their good? What if the mental and emotional damage of that bitterness began to heal, and one became more functional and more impervious to the darkness of the world around them? What if one saw, spiritually, that the whole world was in darkness and enslaved to unrighteousness, and it was a miracle that it kept on going, albeit very badly?

What if all Jesus' red-letter, self-denying teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments were found to be the light of one's life and the world if only a little "blind faith" were used each day to "see it"?

Perception 29
On Being a Natural

What if everyone had "a natural" ability in some area of life, and they should be encouraged, at a young age and in a variety of learning activities, to determine what that is? What if that's what school is all about – to provide opportunities to explore different skills and possible careers that can be further developed in life?

What if every person is meant to find their "God-given talent" to learn and hone it in order to contribute to their families, neighbors, and society? What if God said, *"and in the hearts of all who are skillful I have put skill, that they may make all that I have commanded you"* (Exodus 31:6b)? What if this applies to all people, and throughout the Bible He constantly "raises up" people for both temporal and eternal purposes?

What if, as Christians, *"each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen"* (1 Peter 4:10-11), and *"But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it*

says, 'WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN'" (Ephesians 4:7-8), and *"For it is just like a man about to go on a journey, who called his own slaves and entrusted his possessions to them. To one he gave five talents, to another, two, and to another, one, each according to his own ability; and he went on his journey"* (Matthew 25:14-15), and *"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them"* (Ephesians 2:10)?

What if Christians were actually saved for a reason other than just worshipping God and having God on their side as they lived their own lives? What if they were saved to serve Him and minister to the people He puts in their path? What if everyone is given their "natural talents" in the skills, trades, talents, and aptitudes? What if, however, most will just use them for their own lives or never discover them at all?

What if, even more importantly, each Christian is to hone their "natural selves" to obey their "spiritual selves" that are led by the Holy Spirit in Jesus' teachings to desire mercy not judgment, seek the last place, forgive to be forgiven, turn the other cheek, give all that one had to live on, bear other's burdens, consider others more important, not take into account a wrong suffered, be a peacemaker, and lose one's life in Jesus' ways to gain it? What if, above all, they are to change from being a physical "natural" in this world to a spiritual "natural" in the kingdom of heaven?

Perception 30
On Becoming the Greatest

What if God has given all people a level of talent or position to become great in His kingdom, but those characteristics are the opposite of what the world values? What if *"You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God"* (Luke 16:15)?

What if Jesus gives an example of this with the poor man Lazarus at the rich man's gate? What if God gave the rich man his talents and abilities, not for his own comfort, power, and status in society, but for *"Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share"* (1 Timothy 6:18), and *"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also"* (Matthew 6:19-21)?

What if *"The rich and the poor have a common bond, The LORD is the maker of them all"* (Proverbs 22:2) and the poor-man, Lazarus, had an eternal purpose for billions of people to someday read *"But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your*

good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony" (Luke 16:25)? What if Jesus, the Son of God, Living Word, and Righteous Judge, gave this example to say there is more to believing in Him than to just get saved? What if Jesus expects us to listen to and follow all His red-letter, self-denying, life-losing teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments? What if He expects, through the faith and talents given to each, His life to be lived through us?

What if Jesus also said of the 30 year-old man born blind *"It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him"* (John 9:3)? What if some think this was horrible of God to do that, but what if this man has now testified of His Savior and God for over 2000 years to billions of people and he's probably ok with it? What if this fits with Paul saying, *"Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal"* (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)?

What if, also, the poor have a spiritual "advantage" in this world with *"Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?"* (James 2:5) and *"For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the*

world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are" (1 Corinthians 1:26-28)?

What if, in contrast, the rich have a spiritual "disadvantage" with *"But woe to you who are rich, for you are receiving your comfort in full. Woe to you who are well-fed now, for you shall be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for their fathers used to treat the false prophets in the same way"* (Luke 6:24-26), and *"And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.' But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?' So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God"* (Luke 12:19-21)?

What if, in whatever the faith and talents given to each in this life, there is tremendous hope to live for and glorify the Lord in one's life? What if "becoming the greatest" was in *"It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many"* (Matthew 20:26-28)?

Perception 31
On "Lookin' Goood"

What if a lot of motivation for working out was to "look good" or at least look better? What if running, weight lifting, sports, yard work, home DIY, outdoor hobbies, and indoor chores provided the body with lots of opportunities for movement, flexibility, strength building, and calorie expenditure? What if these things did make you tired and stiff and sore, but one recovered, and you felt more capable and in control of life? What if these activities were done (at some level) over a lifetime with perseverance and endurance – but only to look good?

What if, however, it was always disappointing to realize that one's physique is way more mental than observable? What if, aside from weight loss (which can be masked due to body type, muscle development, and bone structure), a person's level of fitness is not going to be very observable because "muscle tone" is hidden beneath well-hydrated skin, a layer of healthy fat under the skin, clothing, and because relaxed muscles are not at all well-defined? What if nobody is walking around (thankfully) like a competing bodybuilder who is purposely dehydrated, wearing barely anything, oiled and tanned, just pumped from lifting, flexing in different poses, and with mobile lighting to highlight their muscle definition?

What if, therefore, a person's body image was more mental than physical?

What if that's ok? What if the mental benefits of feeling fit, or being on a path of fitness, may be almost equal to the physical benefits of fitness because it brings purpose, confidence, control, hope, and motivation to keep going and do more? What if a very obese person who is very out of shape can begin to have all these things with just a small exercise plan? What if it were the mental benefits that actually propelled the quest for physical health, no matter what level one is at? What if it's way better to "feel" healthy and "feel" like you're on the right path than to hope you're "lookin' goood" by others? What if the confidence gained from feeling like they were on the right path was not, in itself, arrogance or boasting? What if it were an "inner sense" of well-being? What if, on social media, there is a big difference in people showing and teaching others about health versus those going for "lookin' goood"? What if beauty is still only skin deep, and even that takes a tremendous amount of make-up, correct lighting, and filters?

What if Jesus taught that our inner heart was way more important than outward appearances in *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence"* (Matthew 23:25)? What if He also said that looking inwardly in lust at women was equal to committing outward immorality with her? What if He said that *"whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell"* (Matthew 5:22)? What if thinking of people as "idiots" condemned us daily and required confession, repentance, and His mercy?

What if outward appearance and outward good works and deeds were important, but they always require inward compassion, mercy, humility, and forgiveness for others? What if even our thoughts were to be in subjection and bondage to Jesus? What if Paul said, *"we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ"* (2 Corinthians 10:5b)? What if "fruit bearing" of Jesus' good works had to start at the roots of our heart in being willing to hear and obey Jesus red-letter, self-denying teachings and commandments? What if His narrow path was not meant to be easy because we have a "law of sin" in our flesh that wants nothing to do with the "law of God" fulfilled by faith to believe and follow Jesus? What if following Jesus was a daily workout for spiritual fitness?

What if we are told to *"be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord"* (1 Corinthians 15:58) and *"Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal"* (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)?

Perception 32
"For the Love of…"

What if, by way of reminder, this book is about the necessity and benefits of living out God's "righteousness" or "good works" to the world, as taught and exemplified by His Son, that God expects of His true children? What if His "righteousness" to the world is the product of our call to obey in living by *"The second is this, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' There is no other commandment greater than these"* (Mark 12:31)? What if, like physical health that requires a good diet and exercise, practicing His righteousness is the spiritual exercise of spiritual health? What if Jesus even gave it its own B-attitude of persecution in *"Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"* (Matthew 5:10) that was separate from *"Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me"* (Matthew 5:11)?

What if, generally, "righteousness" was all of Jesus' teachings and commandments that dealt with interactions of people: forgiving, desiring and showing mercy, humility, turning the other cheek, confessing Him, seeking the last place, being the Good Samaritan, loving "the least of these," and loving those who don't love you, and loving one's enemies?

What if, spiritually, this represents a lifetime of training opportunities and possibilities through the people and circumstances that God places each of us, with the allotted faith given to each? What if Jesus defines "righteousness" throughout His Sermon on the Mount, and training ourselves in it is how we build our lives (physically and spiritually) on the rock rather than the sand? What if *"Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man…"* (Matthew 7:24a) and *"Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man…"* (Matthew 7:26a)?

What if God also calls His true children to "holiness" and Jesus defines this through *"AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH"* (Mark 12:30)? What if holiness is the separation of ourselves from following our flesh and the world to love and serve God? What if holiness is analogous to the physical health of eating right each day and that was the subject of *What if Jesus was Fat?* by the same author?

What if both righteousness and holiness were part of the "good fight" of being God's true children, and both were separate but overlapping in their spiritual health? What if, by illustration, the modern church has discounted the need to be righteous by twisting *"And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment"* (Isaiah 64:6b) to mean any righteousness from us is "filthy," rather than that they were done in "unholiness"? What if, regardless of false precepts, *"It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints"* (Revelation 19:8)?

Perception 33
Faith, Hope, and Love

What if any physical effort to demonstrate our spiritual faith wasn't really necessary because we are told, "faith not works"? What if that is because *"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast"* (Ephesians 2:8-9)? What if the gift of God is spiritual rebirth, which no person can work for or earn, just like no person has worked or earned themselves to be physically born? What if, also, no one grows up in this temporal life following some exact law to "do this, not that" like a robot? What if, however, we are physically born to then grow to learn the motivations of how to live and even the joy of life, by which "do this, not that" is part of that motivation and varies for each person and every circumstance? What if people do not learn how to live by a law of motivation and joy but by a love for it? What if, at the physical level, that type of love can only be for self or for the world, however right or wrong it has been designated according to society?

What if, at a spiritual level, God has always desired those who believe in Him to live by the motivation and joy of love rather than law? What if the greatest commandments of His law are *"'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND*

WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 22:37-40)? What if this is the same goal and purpose in being a Christian by the faith to believe Jesus' red-letter, self-denying teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments? What if God's law is ultimately fulfilled by faith in Jesus rather than works of the law by *"the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith"* (1 Timothy 1:5)? What if the motivation and joy of life is ultimately found in loving God the way Jesus said to?

What if the teaching that any physical effort to demonstrate our spiritual faith wasn't really necessary because we are told, "faith not works" was wrong? What if "faith not works" was about works of God's law rather than demonstrating "faith by works," not in the works of God's law, but in the works of His Son? What if God gave each Christian a measure of faith in Him by which to hope in Him and to love Him by believing His Son on how to love Him?

What if there were "faith, hope, and love" in that order? What if we were given faith and *"faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ"* (Romans 10:17), where *"the word of Christ"* was all His teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments? What if "faith" that comes from hearing Jesus' words aligns with John's warning, *"Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son"* (2 John 1:9)?

What if Jesus' words have preeminence in scripture because the whole Bible is about Him? What if all the Bible is true, but "faith not works" doesn't exist apart from faith in Jesus to live out the works that He commanded? What if James said, *"But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves"* (James 1:22), *"Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself"* (James 2:17), and *"For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead"* (James 2:26)? What if a great "father" of the reformation, however, called the letter of James "straw" since it didn't align with his theology? What if he simply did not have the guts to extend that idea to all of Jesus' red-letter words and much of the apostles' warnings about living the Christian life? What if it would take centuries to get the theology that everything Jesus said before the cross was part of the law and not applicable to grace, mercy, and forgiveness?

What if, then, it's better to give Jesus, rather than people, the preeminence in theology since He said, *"My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples"* (John 15:8) and *"If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full"* (John 15:10-11)?

Perception 34
Insurance, Security, Defense

What if people work to acquire and maintain some form of security and stability in their lives? What if they wanted a job or career with a steady income to purchase food, clothing, and shelter for themselves and their family? What if they tried to get medical, car, home, and life insurance? What if they wanted some security in their house through locks and cameras? What if that included being armed against intruders, muggers, or worse?

What if, as Christians, we know that God will provide because Jesus said, *"Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things"* (Matthew 6:31-32) and *"So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own"* (Matthew 6:34)? What if this is a great promise of God that Christians can rest in? What if, however, church theology, doctrines, and precepts have set aside Jesus' conditional statement for these promises: *"seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you"* (Matthew 6:33)? What if these verses were from His Sermon on the Mount that contained the specific instructions to *"seek His kingdom and His*

righteousness"? What if "getting saved" and "God providing for us" were two different things?

What if Jesus did not teach against insurance, security, and defense for "self" but redirected the methods from the ways of this world and our self-interests towards the ways of His kingdom and His provision? What if He said things like *"Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal"* (John 6:27), and that work was in living out His red-letter teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments? What if, likewise, He *"said to them, 'My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work'"* (John 4:34)? What if His spiritual food was more important for ourselves and our family's peace, purpose, and power than physical food? What if, in prioritizing His spiritual food, He would guide or bless each person in the jobs, careers, or life that provided the physical food?

What if Jesus told us how to have insured, secured, and defendable houses? What if, however, it wasn't based on our physical efforts to land a good job and keep it, but on our physical thoughts, attitudes, and hearts that translated into the efforts of our daily lives? What if His whole Sermon on the Mount was about our "spiritual house" that would be built on a permanent foundation of rock or a doomed-to-fail foundation of sand? What if the purchase was simple: hear and act upon Jesus Sermon on the Mount, or hear them but continue living one's own life that seems best to you, or even to one's church? What if that were easy to discern, because Jesus' teachings are self-denying, hard, and require constant reminding, attention, prayer, effort, and forgiveness for failures, while the other is way easier, socially and church-acceptable?

What if Jesus' ways included forgiving others to continue in God's forgiveness, showing mercy to others to receive it from God, confessing Jesus for Him to confess us to His Father, seeking the last place, becoming a servant even a slave of other's burdens, being struck verbally or physically and turning the other cheek to be struck again, being sued for one's coat and giving up their coat as well, loving one's enemies rather than defending against them, bearing a cross in all these commandments and losing one's life in them to gain it from Him?

What if it all seems very hard and makes one wonder who would want to do that? What if, likewise, modern church precepts say that all this is not necessary because Jesus is already our righteousness, and when God sees us, He sees the righteousness of His Son? What if that's in the Bible and the Bible is true, and God's people believe the Bible!? What if there are also verses like *"But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption"* (1 Corinthians 1:30), *"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest"* (Matthew 11:28), *"And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus"* (Philippians 4:19)?

What if all these verses are true but not apart from *"For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself?"* (Luke 9:24-25)?

Perception 35
Run to Win, Not to Judge

What if Christian living was actually about competing in a race to be most like Jesus? What if we are told, *"Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable"* (1 Corinthians 9:24-25), *"Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called"* (1 Timothy 6:12a), *"and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us"* (Hebrews 12:1)?

What if each were given a certain amount of faith with which to run? What if we are told, *"For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith"* (Romans 12:3)? What if, at whatever level of faith given, we are to look to ourselves and constantly compare ourselves to Jesus, Who is the standard, the bar, and the finish line? What if, in that way, there would never be any cause for boasting in that comparison, or any judgment of others for it?

What if real Christianity is about a person's faith to follow Jesus rather than just believe in and accept

church doctrines? What if, in this way, nobody can make a judgment about someone's faith because it will always be maturing and expressing itself from the heart and mind in different ways at different levels? What if everyone's faith will only be known later? What if *"In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ"* (1 Peter 1:6-7)?

What if we are given an example of differences in faith by Jesus? What if He said, *"Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we tried to prevent him because he was not following us. But Jesus said, 'Do not hinder him, for there is no one who will perform a miracle in My name, and be able soon afterward to speak evil of Me. For he who is not against us is for us. For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because of your name as followers of Christ, truly I say to you, he will not lose his reward"* (Mark 9:38-41)?

What if running the race to become like Jesus was seeking to hear and obey all of His red-letter, self-denying teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments? What if judging other Christians based on Jesus' idea of a personal relationship with Him would look like "you're not forgiving other's enough," "you're not seeking the last place enough," "you're not a good enough peacemaker," "I'm more like a humble child than you are," "I'm more of a servant (who is greatest among you), even a slave (who is first among you) for others than you are," "I'm hiding my good deeds and prayers for others better than you are," and "you need to be persecuted more for righteousness and for Jesus"?

Perception 36
Bass-Ackward

What if Jesus were lazy? What if He said that Christians should believe Him about the need to be born again and said that was sufficient for His heavenly Father to take care of them and bring them into His kingdom? What if Jesus said not to worry about all the things He said about living again after being born again, according to His red-letter, self-denying, life-losing teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments? What if that's ridiculous and like saying a baby should just be allowed to "be a baby" the rest of their lives, to not grow up, and to only be cared for by their parents? What if Jesus said not to worry about forgiving others, showing mercy, taking care of "the least of these," being the good Samaritan, turning the other cheek, loving those who don't love us, confessing Him to a hateful world, fearing God in holiness, loving our enemies, and losing our lives for Him to gain them from Him? What if He said that He would be the substitute for all those good, righteous things so that we didn't need to be? What if He said, "God loves you, and I died for you to be just the way you are, goochie goo"?

What if the church has created an industry of theology, doctrines, and precepts that all side-step Jesus' words on how to show faith in Him, prove to be His

disciples, and glorify His Father? What if those doctrines have evolved to such a fervor that it's now taught that all of Jesus' words before His death and resurrection are to be negated with God's law and replaced by the cross and God's grace? What if all of His instructed good works from our hearts and hands have been negated? What if, most recently, even sharp arguments against the need to repent of sin to inherit eternal life have arisen? What if the modern church has made the New Covenant between God and people, like the Old Covenant with Israel, into the New Dismissal? What if these precepts are strongly against believing Jesus, literally and personally?

What if *"Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour"* (1 John 2:18), *"These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you. As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him"* (1 John 2:26-27), and *"Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds"* (2 John 1:9-11)

What if, still, *"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me"* (John 10:27)?

Perception 37
Law of Sin

What if the body, the flesh, the old-self, the natural-self had its own law that it must obey, as integrated as instinct? What if, spiritually, this law was called "the law of sin in the flesh"? What if the flesh was always subject to this law to sin, and it was always being coaxed to keep it at some level? What if, however, other external "laws" by governments, by families, and by social norms kept this law of sin from being dominant, and it was therefore expressed differently by different people in different circumstances? What if, scripturally, Paul described it as *"but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?* (Romans 7:23-24)?

What if Paul gave the solution to this problem with *"Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death"* (Romans 8:1-2)? What if, however, most church theology, doctrine, and precepts stopped right there, allowing people to live their lives and give thanks to God for it? What if Paul actually gave a lengthy description of the conditions for being *"in Christ Jesus"* to not be

condemned? What if he said, *"in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God"* (Romans 8:4-8)?

What if walking by the Spirit was to walk according to faith in Jesus to live by all His red-letter, self-denying teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments? What if all those things He said were as hostile to the flesh as the flesh is hostile to God? What if it wasn't easy or supposed to be easy? What if Paul said elsewhere, *"But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please"* (Galatians 5:16-17)?

What if the Christian life is faith in Jesus and that faith is a race of endurance, a pursuit of His prize, and a fellowship of His suffering through His self-denying and life-losing narrow path? What if *"So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live"* (Romans 8:12-13) to be His true children *"and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him"* (Romans 8:17)

Perception 38
"Well, it's the Law!"

What if Christians heard verses like *"as it is written, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE"* (Romans 3:10-12) and *"But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away"* (Isaiah 64:6 KJV)? What if these verses describe the "law of sin" that is within the flesh (Romans 7:23), and that every person certainly has this law of sin within themselves and is exposed to it their entire lives? What if Christians were taught that everyone is under the "law of sin" because "Well, it's the law!"?

What if it is well known to Christians that Jesus death and resurrection free us from the law of sin in our flesh to be alive to Him forever? What if it's also well known that no one can do good, and Jesus' righteousness and holiness have been substituted for our inability to be righteous and holy? What if Jesus is our goodness because we can't be good? What if "God doesn't see sinful me, but His righteous Son who covers me"? What if Jesus both paid the price and lived out the goodness so all people had

to do was believe in Him? What if His cry on the cross, *"It is finished!"* meant that the price of our redemption was fully paid, and any need for our works in or because of that redemption was abolished?

What if people do have a law of sin within themselves, and what if Jesus died so that His blood can forgive those sins? What if, however, what if He forgave sins for people to become children of God, not to have their Christian lives made complete so they can live their own lives, but so that they can live their lives to supplement His life? What if "freed from sin" is the ability to be cleansed from it in order to keep pursuing the holiness and righteousness of God as detailed by Jesus' red-letter, self-denying, life-losing teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments? What if it's been way easier to tell people that Jesus lived the perfect Christian life than His call to perfect His life in themselves? What if believing Him, however, is true saving faith? What if, for the rest of our lives, we believed Him to be forgiven of our sin AND to *"bear fruit in keeping with repentance"* and "*fight the good fight"* and *"trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord"* and *"take My yoke upon you and learn from Me"* and *"blessed are the…"* and *"you are My friends, if you do what I command"* and *"he who hears My words and acts upon them…"* and *"to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me"* and *"If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it"*?

Perception 39
Poor in spirit

What if *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"* (Matthew 5:3) was a real thing for Christians? What if *"poor in spirit"* included depression, loneliness, sadness, grief, emptiness, futility, or despair? What if there were those who were predisposed to those things? What if circumstances arose throughout life to introduce and maintain those things?

What if *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"* (Matthew 5:3) is Jesus' first of the B-attitudes, yet most church teachings and expectations for the Christian life are against those things? What if a poor spirit is expected to be replaced or conquered by His red-letter words of, *"YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS"* (Matthew 11:29b), *"These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full"* (John 15:11), and *"Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful"* (John 14:27)? What if, however, everything Jesus said will always be true? What if there are no "one or the other" contradictions with Jesus because His words are always "both-and," and it is up to us to believe Him and figure it out?

What if Jesus takes away the sin of the world by His cleansing blood, but He does not take away the suffering of the world? What if He transforms the suffering, for those who draw close to Him, into both His purpose and our purpose? What if He doesn't say, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for they shall be healed," or "they shall be ok in my hospital for sinners," or they shall be all better as they know I love them just as they are"? What if He says, *"for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"*? What if He gave examples of Lazarus at the rich man's gate, the woman at the well, "the least of these" and *"Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd"* (Matthew 9:36) and *"but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong"* (1 Corinthians 1:27)?

What if, unlike modern church precepts, Jesus warned against being broken because of sin and staying that way with *"Behold, you have become well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you"* (John 5:14)? What if He said that we are always to repent of sin and be forgiven so that His power may be perfected in our weakness and so that, through the sufferings of this life, *"I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death"* (Philippians 3:10) and *"Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions"* (Colossians 1:24), *"and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him"* (Romans 8:17)?

What if Jesus didn't die just to get people saved and into heaven? What if He's not a doormat for sin so that

any non-repentant, self-interested person can enter His kingdom? What if He died and rose again to make true children of God who "hear His (red-letter) voice" in order to fulfill, with whatever amount of faith, ability, and resource given [5, 2, or 1 talents (Matthew 25:14-30)], *"My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples"* (John 15:8)? What if being "poor in spirit" is to fellowship with Jesus Who was *"despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief"* (Isaiah 53:3a)? What if it is to have a life of complete purpose as one repents of sin and picks up the cross of His teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments for loving God with everything and loving one's neighbor as themselves?

What if His rest, joy, and peace mentioned above are conditional upon His teachings? What if "rest" is *"Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me"* (Matthew 11:29a), "joy" is *"If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love"* (John 15:10), and "peace" is *"He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him"* (John 14:21)?

What if this life was always about having His life lived through us? What if *"Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal"* (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)?

Perception 40
Treasure

What if Jesus' red-letter, self-denying teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments on how to love God with everything and how to love our neighbors are the buried treasure that Jesus described in *"The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field,* (Matthew 13:44a)? What if the church, since the beginning and for the past 2000+ years, has always focused on anything except His red letters on how to express true saving faith? What if it's always easier to find doctrines and mysteries to argue about and to flaunt one's interpretation of "the truth"? What if orthodoxy or Catholicism twisted Jesus' red letters to fit their own agendas of "self-righteousness" and control? What if reformers isolated verses of faith and grace only as another path to get people away from the former authorities? What if believing the right doctrines was "true" faith and salvation, and easier than believing the Savior in *"whoever believes in Him shall…"*? What if the Savior gave a lot of conditions like *"For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions"* (Matthew 6:14-15), and said other hard things like *"For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it"* (Matthew 16:25)?

What if Jesus' definition of a personal relationship with Him, according to His narrow path of life, is the true treasure constantly buried by the church in *"The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field"*? What if it's only through following His self-denying, life-losing teachings, for *"and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field"* (Matthew 13:44)?

What if it's just way easier to believe one's flavor of theology, doctrine, or precepts? What if it's easier to just accept the authority of the church rather than Jesus? What if it's easier to just believe them and attend (more or less) a church? What if Jesus were lazy? What if, rather, His body, the church, were lazy by claiming authority and the "true" interpretation of God's written word for themselves while always lessening responsibility for themselves? What if they excuse themselves with "God's grace given to me," which can cover anything? What if the modern church leadership is dropping like flies from immorality, covetousness, and a fixation on the politics of the world rather than living for the kingdom of God?

What if, however, Jesus' buried treasure was for the individual, rather than the whole with *"which a man found and hid again"* (Matthew 13:44b)? What if Jesus said, *"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me"* (John 10:27) and His voice is not just anything in the Bible, but His red-letter words, for which the rest of the Bible supplements rather than supplants? What if true faith is believing Jesus so as to live by His words? What if *"the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ"* (1 Peter 1:7)?

What if this also means there is no judgment for any church or individual because faith to follow Jesus is from the heart and given in measures to each person, and its true expression is only seen and judged by God? What if *"each one must examine his own work, and then he will have reason for boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another. For each one will bear his own load"* (Galatians 6:4-5)?

What if Jesus teaches the pursuit of His "treasure" throughout His Gospels and the New Testament? What if the free gift of salvation is supposed to cost everything, and Jesus tells us how it's a treasure? What if there is *"But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also"* (Matthew 6:20-21), *"The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil"* (Matthew 12:35), *"So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God"* (Luke 12:21), *"One thing you still lack; sell all that you possess and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me"* (Luke 18:22), *"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves"* (2 Corinthians 4:7), and *"Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed"* (1 Timothy 6:18-19)?

Perception 41
Substitute or Supplement?

What if Jesus saying, *"It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners"* (Mark 2:17) was a central theme of the modern Christian church? What if goes with *"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3:23), *"This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: 'HE HIMSELF TOOK OUR INFIRMITIES AND CARRIED AWAY OUR DISEASES'"* (Matthew 8:17), and *"and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed"* (1 Peter 2:24)? What if *"He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him"* (2 Corinthians 5:21)? What if such verses led the church to define itself as "a hospital for sinners" that rejects and fights against "self-righteous" to recognize that everyone is "unrighteous" and needs Jesus as their substitute righteousness?

What if, however, Jesus never intended His church to be "a hospital for sinners"? What if people in a "hospital for sinners" were those still dealing with unrepentant sin and its repercussions on their lives? What if Jesus never told people to stay sick, but that His forgiveness was to get up and get busy? What if He said, "*Which is easier, to say*

to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven'; or to say, 'Get up, and pick up your pallet and walk'?...I say to you, get up, pick up your pallet and go home" (Mark 2:9, 11b)? What if it were to follow His red-letter, self-denying teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments on how to love God with everything and how to love our neighbors? What if it were for *"My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples"* (John 15:8)?

What if Jesus constantly warned against being apathetic to His words and ways in order to stay on their pallets of sin, victimhood, self-pity, and entitlement? What if He said, *"If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned"* (John 15:6)? What if He warns of being in a spiritual hospice waiting to die in one's sins with *"Behold, you have become well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you"* (John 5:14), *"I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish"* (Luke 13:5), *"Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets'; and He will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you are from; DEPART FROM ME, ALL YOU EVILDOERS'"* (Luke 13:26-27), *"For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep"* (1 Corinthians 11:30), *"I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus"* (1 Corinthians 5:5), and *"for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live"* (Romans 8:13)?

What if Jesus saying, *"It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners"* (Mark 2:17) was not because no one can be righteous, but was Jesus saying it to the Pharisees because He had just called Levi (Matthew) to *"follow Me"*? What if it's a good thing Matthew didn't stay in a hospital (or hospice) for sinners to get his life back together, but chose *"For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS"* (Matthew 16:25-27)? What if Jesus' calling to sinners is not so that He can substitute His righteousness for their unrighteousness, but so that they can supplement His righteousness on earth by being His body?

Perception 42
Your Own Efforts

What if the modern church had numerous precepts such as "Not by your own efforts," "let go and let God," "His work is a finished work," "He is our righteousness because we can't be," "don't try so hard," and "the church is a hospital for sinners"? What if, however, these precepts negated our accountability, covenant, and purpose in temporal and eternal life?

What if, for example, "Jesus is our substitute righteousness because we can't be" negates the problem of sin in one's life so that people can't participate in the war of *"I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members"* (Romans 7:23)? What if *not* fighting this good fight resulted in a burden of death that Christians could not escape *"for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live"* (Romans 8:13)? What if the church has become a hospital for sinners that will never heal because they are not participating, and has become more of a hospice for sinners to make them more comfortable while waiting physical death? What if Jesus made this very clear, for example, in *"Behold, you have*

become well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you" (John 5:14b)?

What if "not by your own efforts" negated God's command to love Him with *"all your heart, soul, mind, and strength"* that He gave each person? What if "every effort" also included His Holy Spirit that teaches and guides us by Jesus' red-letter, self-denying teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments? What if it included the forgiveness of sins by Jesus' blood, together with God's grace and power that enable us? What if "not by your own efforts" negated Jesus living through you?

What if Jesus' and His Apostles' teachings are all "faith *by* works"? What if just a few of Paul's teachings include: *"Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him"* (2 Corinthians 5:9), *"walk as children of Light (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them"* (Ephesians 5:8b-11), *"Now the God of peace…equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ"* (Hebrews 13:20a,21a), *"For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me"* (Colossians 1:29), *"You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin"* (Hebrews 12:4), *"For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God"* (1 Timothy 4:10a), and *"so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God"* (Colossians 1:10)?

Perception 43
The Red Letters

What if a Christian did not metaphorically become "righteous in Jesus" just because they were born again? What if Jesus' death on the cross *was* our substitute for sin's punishment, but not for our righteousness while living a life of unrighteousness? What if, rather, Jesus is our righteousness by our willingness to have Him live through us by obeying and pursuing His teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments?

What if it is true that *"For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not"* (Romans 7:18) because we have a "law of sin" in our flesh that seeks itself, is hostile to God, and will never go away? What if *"I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members"* (Romans 7:23)?

What if that is why our sins can be forgiven, not only specific sins against God, but our vessel of sin, our flesh, that wants independence from Him? What if it's not about "this and that law of God" or "this and that sin against Him," but about having a physical life that does not desire to be lived for God or a spiritual life that does? What if we are saved *"for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting*

to death the deeds of the body, you will live" (Romans 8:13)? What if Jesus told us, in great detail, how to live a spiritual life over our flesh? What if He told us what to pursue, how to act, and even how to think about God and those around us? What if God's grace is for that, His Holy Spirit is for that, His warnings and impending judgments are to keep us on track for that, and His corrective discipline is for that? What if it's only under these conditions that He has promised His rest, His peace, and the fullness of His joy? What if His red-letter words contain the conditions in *"Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS"* (Matthew 11:29), *"These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace"* (John 16:33a), and *"These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full"* (John 15:11)? What if the great omission from the great commission is *"teaching them to observe all that I commanded you"* (Matthew 28:20)?

What if His red-letter teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments were all self-denying, life-losing, non-bragging, humbling, becoming child-like, bearing others' burdens, non-coveting, always forgiving others, always merciful for others, and always loving to the *"least of these," "those who don't love you,"* and *"your enemies"*? What if this took a lifetime of pursuit and training because it is real life in Jesus, Who is: *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me"* (John 14:6), and He expects that any who want to be "born again" to "live again" as He said? What if *"whoever* believes in Him *shall not perish, but have eternal life"* (John 3:16) also includes believing all He said on how we are to live?

Perception 44
Our Efforts, His Righteousness

What if Jesus and the New Testament never taught "not by your own efforts" but, rather, "to make every effort" to love God with everything He's given you and to love your neighbor as yourself? What if, however, the modern church isolated verses like *"by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption"* (1 Corinthians 1:30), and now teach that Jesus dying on the cross as our substitute punishment for sin is also now our substitute for righteousness because everyone has sinned, can't stop sinning, and can't "do good"?

What if this didn't agree with all of Jesus' teachings about being born again in order to live holy and righteous lives, and it didn't even agree with Paul's own teachings on doing good, good works, and eventually being judged on those good works – good works done in faith for Jesus? What if Paul said things like *"And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased"* (Hebrews 13:16), *"to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life* (Romans 2:7), *"Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor"* (1 Corinthians 10:24), *"Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him"* (2 Corinthians

5:9), *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad"* (2 Corinthians 5:10), *"And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed"* (2 Corinthians 9:8), *"Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness"* (2 Corinthians 9:10), *"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them"* (Ephesians 2:10), *"He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need"* (Ephesians 4:28), *"With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free"* (Ephesians 6:7-8), *"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil"* (Ephesians 6:10-11), *"Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm"* (Ephesians 6:13), *"for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. Do all things without grumbling or disputing; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world"* (Philippians 2:13-15), *"so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the*

knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience" (Colossians 1:10-11), *"Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality"* (Colossians 3:23-25), *"See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people"* (1 Thessalonians 5:15), *"Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace, comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word"* (2 Thessalonians 2:16-17), and *"But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary of doing good"* (2 Thessalonians 3:13)? What if this list could keep going by searching Paul's letters for "good"?

What if Jesus *is* our substitute righteousness, not by proxy, but by Him living through us as we are willing, with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, to live by His red-letter, self-denying, teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments on forgiving others, having mercy, seeking the last place, taking care of "the least of these," hiding our good works, loving those who don't love us, loving our enemies, our endurance and perseverance, and losing our lives in Him to gain them from Him? What if these things are Jesus' ideas of a "personal relationship" with Him?

Perception 45
Don't Strive So Hard

What if dieting is hard, exercise is hard, life is hard, and being a Christian is even harder? What if, in contrast to this, the church keeps preaching, "Don't strive so hard"? What if this is the easiest thing for them to say because it's what people want to hear, they can get more attendance and money, and it's a convenient answer for not dealing with other people's problems and having to bear others' burdens?

What if they further say that you owe it to yourself, you're worthy not to worry, God made you special, and He loves you just the way you are? What if they say He's got your back, He'll never leave you or forsake you, and He only sees you as beautiful in His eyes? What if they say the proof of all this is that God gave His Son for you and that when He sees you, He sees Jesus? What if they say don't worry so much because it only produces guilt, shame, and fear, and, besides, God will take care of all your health and life needs – it's all about His grace and power in your weakness, and you can't earn it? What if this was all predicted in *"they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires"* (2 Timothy 4:3b)?

What if, however, God's curses of toil, defeat, and eventual death because of sin haven't gone anywhere? What if, for example, the sin of gluttony and eating out of sensuality causes obesity, and obesity comes with all kinds of morbidity, poor quality of life, and eventual early mortality? What if obesity wasn't about "when God sees fatty you, He sees skinny Jesus"? What if taking on gluttony and sensual eating for Jesus is a daily "good fight" and "good work" done for holiness?

What if a new life in Christ is no longer about being *under* the curse of sin because of His forgiveness, but is also not to be free of the warnings and consequences *of* sin? What if it is about working, toiling, fighting, and striving *against* sin, and about working, toiling, fighting, and striving to *replace* sin with Jesus' narrow path of life, though following all His red-letter, self-denying teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments taken literally and personally?

What if the church's platitude of "don't try so hard" stood in contrast to the message of Jesus and the New Testament? What if, rather, we sought to live a real life in Christ by *"Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus"* (2 Timothy 2:3), *"You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin"* (Hebrews 12:4), *"heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him"* (Romans 8:17b), and *"strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, 'Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God'"* (Acts 14:22)?

Perception 46
On Being Legit

What if the trials of life were part of being disciplined by our heavenly Father? What if, for instance, years of sensual eating and lack of physical activity produced various pathologies of the body? What if, in addition, the quality of life suffered from being less active, less interactive, and less fit? What if personal, social, or mental insecurities also developed from inactivity, weight gain, and poor health? What if these difficulties (trials), however, were designed to change us to *"Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever"* (1 John 2:15-17)?

What if building a life in Jesus for God was the only life that would last to eternity? What if building that life on earth was the only real fulfillment of physical life? What if then, trials of physical and mental suffering are terrible but also life-giving because we are still alive and God is goading us to lay aside the love of the world and the flesh to be renewed in His Son's ways? What if still "being alive" is a good sign because *"All unrighteousness*

is sin, and there is a sin not leading to death (1 John 5:17)? What if recognizing and embracing His discipline in our lives is a good sign and is essential to the Christian life because *"if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons"* (Hebrews 12:8)? What if discipline brought us closer to God by following and fellowshipping with Jesus?

What if there are two kinds of discipline? What if the first represents the best kind and is exemplified by Jesus Who *"Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation"* (Hebrews 5:8-9) and *"For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted"* (Hebrews 2:18)? What if most Christians don't consider the importance of Jesus' suffering throughout His ministry *before* going to the cross? What if He said, *"You are those who have stood by Me in My trials"* (Luke 22:28)? What if Jesus was sinless, yet still had to be "made perfect" in human form through the obedience that comes through suffering of the flesh? What if this form of discipline was the building, testing, and proving of our willingness and faith to have God live through our mortal flesh? What if, however, we are that much farther from Jesus' perfection, but we are still expected to endure the trials of life for the same reasons that Jesus endured them?

What if the second form of discipline, in contrast to perfecting discipline, is the kind that leads to continued repentance and spiritual growth? What if our "love of the world and love of the flesh" was grieving and quenching the Spirit of God within us (Ephesians 4:30, 1 Thessalonians 5:19), and our Christian lives were lacking in the peace, purpose, and power that Jesus has for us?

What if continued sin affects our bodies and minds? What if, however, our Heavenly Father is a jealous God who wanted these things to stop and to be replaced by His life in us – because His life in us is all that matters? What if discipline was necessary to get our attention, make us contrite, set aside the world's ways, and put us back under His umbrella of healing, provision, and protection? What if this discipline were well worth enduring to change both our temporal and eternal lives?

What if the New Testament says a lot about the hope that comes from suffering, discipline, and endurance? What if, for example, Peter says, *"For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong"* (1 Peter 3:17)? What if the author of Hebrews says, *"For they* [earthly fathers] *disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness"* (Hebrews 12:10-11)?

Perception 47
When Success Breeds Failure

What if, ironically, pursuing physical health by eating better, losing weight, and more physical activity was a set-up for failure because it made us think we were now ok to "live a little" (in excess) and, over time, that idea became a little more and a little more (excess)? What if drifting away from the need of maintenance, perseverance, and endurance in dieting and exercise is a good spiritual parallel for the most common mistakes among God's people and the most warnings from Jesus and the Bible? What if those mistakes are to drift from His ways, to be deceived that they are unnecessary, or to minimize them into non-existence?

What if, ironically, these mistakes often occur by the distractions of God's blessings? What if He said, *"Beware that you do not forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes which I am commanding you today; otherwise, when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived in them,…and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God…Otherwise, you may say in your heart, 'My power and the strength of my hand made me this wealth.' But you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who is*

giving you power to make wealth, that He may confirm His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day" (Deuteronomy 8:11-18)?

What if Jesus, likewise, warned us, *"But they all alike began to make excuses. The first one said to him, 'I have bought a piece of land and I need to go out and look at it; please consider me excused.' Another one said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please consider me excused.' Another one said, 'I have married a wife, and for that reason I cannot come.'"* (Luke 14:18-20)?

What if "perceived success" from "God's blessings" was the very thing that distracted us from following Jesus? What if Jesus' red-letter, self-denying, life-losing teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments for His narrow path of life have long been replaced by going to church, praying for the blessings and healings, and acquiring enough "biblical knowledge"? What if church doctrines and precepts no longer consider the requirement and standard of true Christianity to be Jesus' way of self-denial, self-emptying, picking up one's cross, loving those who do not love us, witnessing of Him to those who hate Him, losing our lives to find His, not paying back evil for evil, humbling ourselves, and giving to those in need? What if, regardless of church precepts, all His red-letter teachings must be pursued with whatever blessings and ability that God provides each person? What if this will make us stand (on the rock) when the blessings and wealth are reduced or taken away (by the storms of life)? What if *"Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to…"* and *"Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like…"* (Matthew 7:24a, 26a)?

Perception 48
Enabling/Entitling

What if working out consistently provided many health benefits, but physical health was still hampered by eating poorly and eating too much? What if, spiritually, this was analogous to *"all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment"* (Isaiah 64:6b)? What if the "righteousness" of working out was marred by the "unholiness" of poor eating? What if, according to modern church interpretation, this verse wasn't a condemnation of righteous deeds, but the unholiness of the Israelites trying to keep God's law by loving their neighbors while disregarding His laws on morality? What if they were "doing the most good" while accepting (or turning a blind eye) to the most evil (immorality)? What if they were enabling others (righteousness) in life while entitling others (and themselves) to sin (unholiness)? What if the Bible repeatedly warns about soiled garments and linens where garments are "righteous deeds, good works, and loving thy neighbor" that are stained and blemished with the unholiness of immorality, the love of the world, and the love of the flesh? What if *"It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints"* (Revelation 19:8)? What if *"But you have a few people in Sardis who have not*

soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy" (Revelation 3:4)?

What if it's way easier to *"love your neighbor as yourself"* publicly than to love God with everything in private? What if loving one's neighbor also looks good to unbelievers and helps gain their approval and acceptance for being a Christian? What if it's also thought that "enabling your neighbors' lives" should include entitling them (and yourself) to God's grace and forgiveness for sin? What if loving one's neighbor as oneself also included not telling others that God will judge all and hold all accountable to their deeds because you, personally, don't want to be judged or held accountable for sin? What if, besides, the church has come up with all kinds of theology, doctrines, and precepts to negate Jesus' and New Testament warnings to teach that Christians won't be judged or held accountable for sin? What if the modern Church has become an industry that issues licenses to keep sinning and not be held accountable? What if "it's all about grace and forgiveness, Jesus covers your sin, don't beat yourself up, don't try so hard, love yourself to love others, God loves you just the way you are, when God sees you He sees Jesus, and salvation is a finished work"?

What if Jude says this perfectly in *"For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ"* (Jude 1:4)? What if Christianity is not the absolute removal of "self-will," but the fight to direct our will to the will of God rather than the will of self? What if Jesus, Who was without sin, still had a "self-will" to not undergo torture and crucifixion, but set it aside for His Father's will? What if striving, endurance, and perseverance to seek and follow

Jesus' ways were the fight and the victory? What if Jesus' ways are all His red-letter, self-denying, life-losing teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments? What if they will not be lived out perfectly, but sin can be perfectly forgiven to keep living them out? What if this is true saving faith? What if Jesus paid the price to forgive our imperfections for the fight rather than to excuse ourselves from it? What if Jesus did not die to supplement our lives but for us to supplement His? What if that is also the only place we will find "His peace that surpasses understanding," "His joy made complete," and "rest for our souls"? What if a continual fight to "put to death" that insidious, latent sin is so worthwhile? What if that's motivation enough, but Jude continues his teaching on licentiousness with *"Now I desire to remind you, though you know all things once for all, that the Lord, after saving a people out of the land of Egypt, subsequently destroyed those who did not believe"* (Jude 1:5)?

Perception 49
The Owner's Manual

What if *"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life"* (John 3:16) was the heart of Christianity? What if eternal life came from believing in Jesus Christ? What if *"believes in Him"* meant to believe that Jesus gave the owner's manual for how to have real faith and real life by His red-letter teaching, commandments, warnings, and judgments in His Gospels and Revelation?

What if salvation is a free gift, but a gift that must be used according to His straightforward instructions for starting real life by His forgiveness of sins and our repentance of them, and straightforward instructions for operating and maintaining real life? What if this gift does not include the option to say "thank you" and then put it away in the closet (or bury it as the talent)? What if the gift must interface with our lives to love God with everything and to love our neighbors? What if the gift must be used to be holy, not love the flesh and the world, forgive others, show mercy and compassion, turn the other cheek, not covet, flee immorality, care for the least of these, humble ourselves, be peacemakers, put to death the deeds of the flesh, love our enemies, and fear God, etc.?

What if Jesus' red-letter owner's manual also included a plethora of "safety warnings" linked to most of His instructions for real life? What if He said, for example, *"But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions"* (Matthew 6:15), *"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy"* (Matthew 5:7) *"and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell"* (Matthew 5:22c), *"Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand"* (Matthew 7:26), and many others? What if we were to take these warnings and impending judgments literally and personally throughout our daily lives? What if, however, His troubleshooting guide was very simple: to confess the shortcoming (sin), repent, start following His instructions – and to repeat as needed? What if this is what real freedom in Him is: to be forgiven of sin, filled with His Holy Spirit, and continue along His narrow path?

What if Jesus also told His disciples about the "specification sheet" that would be coming for His "owner's manual"? What if He said, *"I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now"* (John 16:12)? What if Jesus' apostles provided those things, including the parts list and mysterious specifications sheet on how and why His life and sacrifice changed following God's law into faith to follow all that He said on how to have real temporal and eternal life? What if the specifications were given to provide encouragement and hope while having faith to follow Jesus' red-letter, self-denying teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments? What if the specifications given in the black letters were more difficult and mysterious to understand as Jesus said they would be (John 16:4-15), and as Peter said, *"as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things,*

in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction" (2 Peter 3:16)]? What if even Paul said, *"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!"* Romans 11:33), *"And who is adequate for these things?"* (2 Corinthians 2:16)?

What if following Jesus' red-letters on how to love God with everything and love one's neighbors was hard? What if He summarized His narrow path of life in *"If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it"* (Matthew 16:24-25)? What if knowing and believing the specification sheets of the apostles was way easier than following Jesus' red-letter instructions on how to live by faith? What if people could avoid the difficult, accountable life and also brag about how they "know the truth" about all the mysterious specs, while others do not? What if "knowledge" about the mysteries and precepts of God's "unconditional love" was way easier than His sacrificial love and our expected return of that sacrificial love to Him and the world around us?

What if people tried to become knowledge-based experts on the mysterious specifications and various parts lists and called it "apostolic faith," which is faith in the apostles' teachings? What if this were to replace a real saving faith in Jesus on how to live? What if it were way easier to believe, have faith in, and follow doctrines about salvation than to believe, have faith in, and follow the Savior, Himself? What if they could still boast that they had the whole owner's manual (the Bible) and knew the truth of it (according to ever-evolving theologies,

precepts, and traditions) but completely bypass its "turn-on and operate portion" (Jesus' red-letter, self-denying teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments)? What if they could show off their Sola Scriptura (authority of scripture, alone) while ignoring, filtering, twisting, and/or completely negating Solus Christos (the authority of Christ, alone, for what scripture is all about)? What if this allowed them to have an endless number of denominations, giving each the chance to boast that "they have the truth" (while others don't)? What if *"Knowledge* [of Sola Scriptura] *makes arrogant, but love* [by following Solus Christos] *edifies"* (1 Corinthians 8:1b)?

What if, regardless, *"So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ"* (Romans 10:17), *"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away"* (Matthew 24:35) and *"Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son"* (2 John 1:9)? What if troubleshooting this was clear and easy? What if it were just acting on His red letters, literally and personally, every day, for the time He gives us?

Perception 50
"Christian" Philosophies

What if Christians embraced worldly philosophies that had nothing to do with Jesus' teachings? What if those philosophies distracted, went against, and robbed us of Jesus' teachings, which would be the only path to His real purpose, peace, and power?

What if things like "don't let another's negativity ruin your day" replaced the commandment to forgive that person and have the power to kill bitterness? What if "believe in all that's possible" gave a false generic hope, rather than the specific hope in *"we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose"* (Romans 8:28)? What if "loving someone doesn't mean being disrespected by them" does not fit with *"love those who do not love you"* in order to fellowship with the "disrespect" that Jesus endured on the cross, and the longsuffering "disrespect" that God has endured since the fall of man? What if the world's "3 big rules of relationships" were not lying, cheating, or making unkept promises) were changed to the "3 big rules of loving our neighbor (family, friends, anyone):" forgiving, considering others more important, and bearing one another's burdens? What if worldly sayings like "humility *results* from knowing God and yourself" were inverted to

humbling oneself before God to know Him? What if the world's "8 signs of a toxic person" were not used to justify divorcing ourselves from others, but to examine how toxic we are in others' eyes, and then to befriend such people with the love of Jesus? What if the only outcome for toxicity is *"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy"* (Matthew 5:7)? What if we recognized that the roots of bitterness in ourselves and others were due to sin within ourselves and from the world? What if the continual forgiveness of our sins by Jesus and our forgiveness of others would pull up these toxic roots, and it was the only way to bring peace in ourselves and peace with others?

What if there are countless other Christian philosophies, precepts, doctrines, and traditions that should be routinely compared to Jesus' red-letter, self-denying teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments that are true belief in Him and true saving faith for us? What if Jesus' red letters were His idea of a "personal relationship" with Him? What if reading Him again, literally and personally, would reveal just how far away we and the church are from His narrow path? What if, however, it's always been for those *"with ears to hear, let them hear,"* each with the allotment of faith and good works assigned to them?

Perception 51
The Timely Usurper

What if Jesus allowed those who were not walking according to His ways to control His earthly ministries? What if, for instance, Jesus *allowed* the Scribes, Pharisees, and Lawyers to usurp His authority? What if He said, *"The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them"* (Matthew 23:3-4)?

What if He still allows church, ministry, and missionary leaders who don't walk by His red-letter, self-denying teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments to lead His church? What if, however, He still works through His church despite the leadership and their teachings that ignore, distort, or negate His own? What if He had warned His disciples to distinguish between His following and non-following leaders? What if He still says, *"You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit,"* and *"So then, you will know them by their fruits"* (Matthew 7:16-17, 20)?

What if He says of those who are acting according to His ways, *"Who then is the faithful and sensible steward, whom his master will put in charge of his*

servants, to give them their rations at the proper time? Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes" (Luke 12:42-43)? What if He says of those who, like the plethora of fallen modern Christian leaders, *"But if that slave says in his heart, 'My master will be a long time in coming,' and begins to beat the slaves, both men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk, the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces, and assign him a place with the unbelievers"* (Luke 12:45-46)? What if He continues to warn, *"And that slave who knew his master's will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, will receive many lashes, but the one who did not know it, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few. From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more"* (Luke 12:47-48)?

What if His words are full of these warnings and impending judgments to leadership and all those who name Him and claim Him but dis His ways? What if He says, *"Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn"* (Matthew 13:30)? What if He continues these warnings in the Book of Revelation? What if He said such things as *"Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent"* (2:5), and *"Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth"* (2:16), and *"And I will kill her children with pestilence, and all the churches will know*

that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds" (2:23), and *"He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels"* (3:5), and *"Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth"* (3:10), and *"Because you say, 'I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,' and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked"* (3:17)?

Perception 52
The Gospels

What if the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were written and introduced to the church only just today? What if the church, for the first time, heard Jesus' conditional statements of faith in Him like: *"If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell"* (Matthew 5:29), *"Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect"* (Matthew 5:48), *"Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions"* (Mark 11:25), *"For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it"* (Luke 9:24), *"You are My friends if you do what I command you"* (John 15:14), and *"If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love"* (John 15:10)?

What if these "conditional" statements were made by Jesus, Who is God, and they did not fit with the current theology, doctrines, precepts, and traditions of the modern church? What if Jesus said that His words were given to Him by God, that He and the Father were One, and that His Father said, *"This is My beloved Son, with whom I am*

well-pleased; listen to Him!" (Matthew 17:5b)? What if Jesus said, *"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away"* (Luke 21:33)?

What if the gospels were given so that Christians would not follow a "new law," but a new faith to follow Jesus' life through His teachings, and for it to be how to "live again" once one was "born again"? What if God's children are not born-again by their works (who chooses to be born?), but raised to live by works established by their Father through His First-Born Son? What if John expressed this directly in *"Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds"* (2 John 1:9-11)?

What if, however, illegitimate children ignored, diminished, or denounced the teachings of Jesus and even dismissed them from any part of salvation? What if they called them unnecessary for spiritual growth or for being legitimate children? What if this was modern theology that had already been introduced in the early church? What if *"For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. Now I desire to remind you, though you know all things once for all, that the Lord, after saving a people out of the land of Egypt, subsequently destroyed those who did not believe"* (Jude 1:4-5)?

Perception 53
WWJD or WDJD and WDJS?

What if the catchphrase "What Would Jesus Do?" (WWJD) were more often dismissed because culture and modern-day differences would make that "not applicable"? What if, for instance, there are no real crosses for people to carry since occupying military no longer use those methods to control and oppress citizens? What if there aren't many opportunities for a "Good Samaritan" to help a stripped, beaten traveler on the road, together with an obliging innkeeper? What if 911, with all its emergency responders, has replaced all that? What if raising someone from the dead was no longer possible because access to a morgue was very restricted and illegal? What if most of Jesus miracles in raising the dead and in feeding and healing thousands of people were to display His authority from God to demonstrate that He is the promised Messiah to the Jews and Christ to the world? What if "WWJD" wasn't specific for doing what He did in the present-day, modern culture?

What if WWJD became more specific by saying "What *Did* Jesus Do" (WDJD) or "What Did Jesus *Say"* (WDJS)? What if, for instance, "What Jesus did" was to leave the security and comforts of His family and the world behind, walk from town to town the length of Isreal, sleep outside, eat whatever His Heavenly Father gave Him

that day, preach to strange people, be continuously rebuked and scoffed at, be targeted for death, provide for the physical needs of others who just wanted His hand-outs rather than His teaching, teach disciples who never seemed to get it, minister to those who would forsake you, entrust finances to the person you knew would embezzle them and ultimately betray you, and tirelessly do all these things knowing that suffering, death, and all the sins of the world were the finish line and goal? What if "What Did Jesus Do" (WDJD) was custom prepared at a level for each of us so that it would translate to "What We Will Do" (WWWD) each day?

What if Christians shouldn't be asking for "God's will in their lives" because it has already been given by Jesus? What if "What Did Jesus *Say* (WDJS) to do" is the fulfillment of God's will for any Christian's life? What if Jesus' red-letter, self-denying, life-losing teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments, taken literally and personally, comprised WDJS? What if the fulfillment of God's will in the Christian is to desire and pursue WDJS each day? What *"If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love"* (John 15:10), *"He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day"* (John 12:48), and *"You are My friends if you do what I command you"* (John 15:14) were as much a part of eternal life as being "born again"?

What if WDJS to do included, greet those who do not greet us, provide a cup of water (or any small blessing) to someone in need, humble ourselves as children to others or to life's challenges, say a prayer of compassion in place of feeling indignant, forgive everyone of anything, point to Jesus in a world that hates Him, turn the other cheek to

the rebuke, dismissal, and contempt of others, give with an open hand to those who may misuse it, beware of any form of covetousness, take the last place, become a servant and even a slave of others, and ultimately live out *"And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it"* (Matthew 10:38-39)?

What if Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (SOM), alone, provides many of His WDJS for us to fulfill WWWD (What We Will Do) in our lives – *if* we are willing to be His disciples and followers? What if striving to live out His SOM made the difference for our physical and spiritual lives to be on the rock or on the sand? What if the rock and sand were, respectively, to be either on His security (rock) or vulnerability to the flesh and the world's darkness and destruction (sand)? What if He concluded His sermon with *"Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall"* (Matthew 7:24-27)?

Perception 54
Percent Suffering

What if God's original curse of physical toil, suffering, and death is echoed in "*Vanity of vanities! All is vanity. What advantage does man have in all his work Which he does under the sun?"* (Ecclesiastes 1:2-3)? What if the purpose of suffering, however, has been transformed through believing and following Jesus? What if there was an amount of suffering in this life that could be avoided by obedience to Jesus? What if, conversely, there was an amount of suffering that came from obedience to Jesus? What if suffering from disobedience led us to suffer through obedience? What if the latter was a reflection and sharing of God's long suffering that would result in His glory and our inheritance in His eternal glory?

What if this suffering was discussed throughout the New Testament in *"Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish"* (Luke 13:4-5), *"Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, 'Behold, you have become well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you'"* (John 5:14), *"And He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.' Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast*

about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:9-10), *"Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted"* (2 Titus 3:12), *"For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps"* (1 Peter 2:19-21), *"For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ. But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer"* (2 Corinthians 1:5-6), *"For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world"* (1 Corinthians 11:30-32), *"and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him"* (Romans 8:17), *"Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God"* (Acts 14:22), *"For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong"* (1 Peter 3:17), *"Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing*

were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation" (1 Peter 4:12-13), and *"I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality. Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. And I will kill her children with pestilence, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds"* (Revelation 2:21-23)?

What if there is way more to being a Christian than "getting saved" and living your life to the fullest because "God's got your back"? What if the "good news" of the Gospel also includes the good news of the purpose of suffering in this life? What if the above verses are just a sample of *"For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS"* (Matthew 16:25-27)?

Perception 55
Hands that are Tied

What if our hands seemed hopelessly tied in whatever we are trying to do? What if nothing seemed to be working out, no matter what direction we set our mind and body? What if the Christian philosophy "let go and let God" felt more like God had let us go because He was not blessing any of our efforts? What if we thought that our efforts were for Him, but He did not seem to make them productive or useful?

What if this was part of God's way? What if this were a routine pattern for those who follow Jesus? What if it started with Jesus ministering to thousands of people for over three years, only to end up with a total lack of understanding by His closest disciples, their abandonment at the darkest hour, and His death on the cross? What if this pattern continued among His apostles, who had relatively insignificant ministries (no concert churches) amid persecution, social upheaval, and Christians who drifted, fell away, or embraced heresies? What if their ministries were steeped in accusations and suffering, culminating in martyrdom? What if the lives of so many leading missionaries, such as William Cary, the Moravians, Hudson Taylor, C.T. Studd, Gladys Aylward, Amy Carmichael, Corrie ten Boom, Richard Wurmbrand,

Helen Roseveare, and many others, were riddled with constant suffering, loss, and death?

What if there is a cloud of witnesses composed of these people, with only a few famous and mostly unknown to the modern church? What if the job of His children was not to present a long-winded explanation of the propitiation of sins, but to plant seeds by their own personal testimonies of knowing Jesus and seeing Him work through their lives according to His red-letter, self-denying, word and deed teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments? What if, however, most of that testimony would be met with indifference, apathy, resentment, or criticism? What if Jesus referred to this as *"because you have kept the word of My perseverance…"* which met following His commandments required endurance, non-boasting, a lack of glory, self-denial, cross-bearing, and slow or complete loss of life?

What if "hands that are tied" were just part of the normal Christian life for loving God with everything and loving one's neighbors? What if those annoyances and frustrations of modern-day life could still be done for Jesus and counted for eternity? What if it were His training ground of endurance, perseverance, and long-suffering for walking with Him and becoming imitators of God?

Perception 56
In Sickness and In Health

What if sickness had as much purpose in life as health? What if sickness had three biblical purposes: judgment, discipline, or the glory of God?

What if for judgment He said, *"The LORD God commanded the man, saying, 'From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die'"* (Genesis 2:16-17), *"immediately an angel of the Lord struck him* [Herod] *because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and died"* (Acts 12:23), *"But Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land?…' And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last; and great fear came over all who heard of it"* (Acts 5:3,5), *"All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not leading to death"* (1 John 5:17), and *"I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish"* (Luke 13:3)?

What if for discipline – to repent and keep following or to become more like God – He said, *"But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons"* (Hebrews 12:8), *"Behold, you have become well; do not*

sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you" (John 5:14b), *"I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus"* (1 Corinthians 5:5), *"Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect…"* (Hebrews 5:8-9a), *"Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing"* (James 1:2-4), and *"In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ"* (1 Peter 1:6-7)?

What if for God's glory He said, *"it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him"* (John 9:3b) and *"'Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. I knew that You always hear Me; but because of the people standing around I said it, so that they may believe that You sent Me.' When He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come forth'"* (John 11:41b-43)?

What if judgment is God's calling others to return to Him, discipline keeps us on His narrow path of life that brings the character and conduct of Jesus into our lives, and God's glory is His desire to share that glory with us in *"For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal"* (2 Corinthians 4:17-18)?

Perception 57
The Seventh Church

What if Jesus described for us seven types of churches with spiritually good and bad characteristics? What if these characteristics were present in the churches of that day, but have also been present among churches throughout the world and throughout history? What if the seven types of churches also represent seven chronological phases of church history, with one type predominating in each era? What if the Church of Laodicea (Revelation 3:14-22) is the last of the seven and describes the current, modern church?

What if, in His last letter, Jesus first confronts the modern church that is steeped in the influence and/or acceptance of evolution, which denounces God's creation and His continued authority over it and over all peoples, nations, and life itself? What if He begins the letter with *"The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God"* (Revelation 3:14b)?

What if, just like the previous six churches, the Laodicean letter was concerned with the "deeds, works, and actions" of the church? What if a review of the specific deeds, works, and actions of the seven churches indicated that Jesus, Who is the Head of the church, considers the deeds, works, and actions of the church to be an important indicator of true saving faith in Him?

What if, to the modern, Laodicean-like church, Jesus said, *"I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot"* (Revelation 3:15)? What if, in contrast, the theology, doctrines, and precepts of the modern church said that good works are equivalent to "filthy rags," unworthy of Jesus, and that they even diminish His "finished work" on the cross? What if, even worse, many teach that Jesus' red-letter, self-denying teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments are no longer valid because of the cross and God's grace, and that the church has always been about "faith not works" rather than "faith by works"? What if the modern church had long set aside good works in a Christian as the result, proof, confirmation, evidence, and witness of Christ living in them? What if they didn't realize that good works are Jesus' good works rather than their own, and the absence of these works was equivalent to the absence of Jesus in them? What if Jesus warned about "being in Him" but not bearing fruit? What if He said, *"Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit"* (John 15:2) and *"If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned"* (John 15:6)?

What if the church used and boasted of God's grace to replace the need for any good works? What if they said, as Jesus quotes in His letter, *"I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing"* (Revelation 3:17a)? What if that was because the church had created a new Christianity based on theological traditions and precepts about the propitiation of sins, faith and grace alone, faith not works, freedom from God's law, and "God loves me just the way I am," and "when God sees me, He

sees Jesus"? What if the emphasis of the modern church was John 3:16, *"for God so loved the world…"* with complete disregard for the Revelation of John 3:16, *"So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth"*? What if the church embraces John 3:16 without the whole purpose being *"But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God"* (John 3:21)? What if the church agreed with *"whosoever believes in Him…"* but then taught that belief in doctrines about salvation was eternal life rather than belief in Jesus and all He said on how we are to live by His, red-letter, self-denying, self-emptying, life-losing teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments? What if it were easier to have faith in theologies, doctrines, and precepts rather than Jesus? What if the church had long ago "accumulate(d) for themselves teachers in accordance with *their own desires"* (2 Timothy 4:3b)?

What if the modern church saw itself as having "need of nothing" and was waiting to be raptured before the Great Tribulation? What if they didn't know that only the Philadelphian church was given escape in *"Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth"* (Revelation 3:10)? What if that was an historical warning for a church that has come and gone?

What if the modern church, rather, was represented by Jesus' parable with all the virgins asleep at the coming of the bridegroom, but some were ready and would see their way to entering His kingdom, and some were not ready and would not enter (Matthew 25:1-13)? What if "being ready" was the acquisition of oil for their lamps by knowing the cost of obeying and following Jesus? What if

this were their light toward the ultimate cost?

What if, however, Jesus is still calling the Laodicean-like church to repentance with *"you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see"* (Revelation 3:17b-18)? What if the cost of these things were the same as "buying oil," above? What if the cost of *"gold refined by fire"* is also the cost of faith in *"so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ"* (1 Peter 1:7)? What if the cost of *"white garments…that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed"* is also the cost of righteousness in *"It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints"* (Revelation 19:8)? What if the cost of *"eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see"* is also the cost of holiness in *"The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!"* (Matthew 6:22-23)?

What if Jesus' call to the modern Laodicean church to repent and be ready for His return continues in *"Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me"*? What if the modern church had long ago ignored this warning and opportunity for repentance and repurposed

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock" for their precepts on "proselytization" Christianity? What if Jesus continues with *"He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne"* (Revelation 3:19-21)? What if the first sign Jesus described of His impending return following the "birth pangs" was *"Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name"* (Matthew 24:9)? What if Jesus is still knocking on the door for us to be ready by following His red letters?

What if the modern church also contorted the general assembly of "saved" Christians in the Revelation passage *"After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb'"* (Revelation 7:9-10)? What if, however, these were not "saved Christians" but only those who overcame the tribulation? What if John specifically asked about this with the elder answering, *"These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb"* (Revelation 7:14)? What if, finally, there are three factors for how they overcame: 1) *"And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and* 2) *because of the word of their testimony, and* 3) *they did not love their life even when faced with death"* (Revelation 12:11)? What if Jesus taught how to prepare for the third factor, but the modern Laodicean church does not?

Perception 58
Debriefing

What if a typical church service for the poor, homeless, and mentally disabled saw occasional temper flare-ups, couples pawing each other, people going back and forth to the bathroom or going outside to drink alcohol or smoke, most people not giving an offering, most not singing, administrative frictions, people urinating on themselves, people defecating in the bushes, panic attacks by the piano player, people experiencing vertigo from psychedelic worship videos, and people breaking down in tears over bad relationships?

What if Jesus warned all Christians that the *"least of these, My brethren"* were expected to be cared for by those who God had given more physical stability, strength, and resources? What if the "low functioning" were to be cared for by the "high functioning"? What if *"Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?* (James 2:5), *"Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God"* (Matthew 19:24), and *"Jesus said to him, 'If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me'"* (Matthew 19:21) were to be taken

literally and personally, and were as valid today as when He first said them? What if He said, *"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away"* (Matthew 24:35)?

What if, in God's eyes, a typical church service for the poor, described above, also represented, spiritually, a typical church service for the most wealthy, healthy, and well-to-do Christians? What if God, Who sees all that is in secret, has seen what every congregant did and thought in the past days, weeks, months, and years, and sees the baggage of sin and lack of faithfulness brought into His assembly? What if He sees people in better cloths with higher degrees, cars, houses, and families that are full of temper flare-ups, pornography, addictions to drugs, alcohol, food, or entertainment, a love of the world and all it has to offer, frictions, people defiling themselves and others by their thoughts, words, and actions, panic attacks, people with their hidden physical and mental disabilities, and people breaking down in tears (at least inwardly) over bad relationships?

What if God sees congregants worshiping with all this baggage of sin, unfaithfulness, and lack of faith, yet unaware or unconcerned that something is wrong? What if He said things like *"THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN"* (Matthew 15:8-9) and *"Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?"* (Luke 6:46)?

What if the works of God through His children are dead because the requirement for holiness and righteousness in a Christian's life has been deemphasized, discouraged, and negated by church theologies, doctrines, and precepts? What if the congregants didn't care about

making daily, radical changes in their lives according to Jesus' red-letter, self-denying teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments because the church is only "a hospital for sinners" and that's why they're there? What if "God meets you where you're at," "God loves you just the way you are," "His work is a finished work," "not by my efforts but by His grace," and when "God sees me, He sees Jesus' righteousness covering me"? What if these things create a spiritually poor, homeless, and mentally disabled church that has no clue how to get well? What if Jesus warned of this in *"Because you say, 'I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,' and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked"* (Revelation 3:17)?

What if the church has long been deceived into a new Christianity that believes "doctrines about salvation" rather than the Savior Himself? What if believing the Savior to live as He said has been replaced by "believe the Bible"? What if "Sola Scriptura" has replaced "Solus Christos," even though the whole point of Sola Scriptura is to have us believe Jesus? What if *"whoever believes in Him"* (John 3:16b) still meant: *"Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son"* (2 John 1:9), *"So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ"* (Romans 10:17), and *"He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me"* (John 14:24)?

Perception 59
Master Builder – Bedrock

What if Jesus was not lazy, was raised as a Carpenter, understood buildings, was always physically or spiritually building, and testified *"My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working"* (John 5:17) and *"My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work"* (John 4:34)? What if all His red-letter, self-denying, life-losing words are the blueprint to build His kingdom within ourselves and the church?

What if Jesus referred to a Christian's life as a building with a foundation placed on bedrock and then built over a lifetime? What if Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) was for teaching believers how to be His disciples? What if it were His ideas of a "personal relationship" with Him? What if He concluded the Sermon by detailing what was and was not bedrock on which they would build their Christian lives? What if He said the bedrock was *"Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them…"* (Matthew 7:24a) and the non-bedrock was *"Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them…"* (Matthew 7:26a)? What if the rock and the sand did not, as the modern church teaches, represent "God's word" and anything in it other than Jesus' words, but Jesus red-letter words on how to love God with everything and how to love our neighbors?

What if then, the true bedrock of saving faith in Him is to forgive others, desire and show mercy for others, be peacemakers, turn the other cheek, go the extra mile, and *"let him have your coat, also"* when oppressed by others? What if it were to fear God, take care of "the least of these," be the Good Samaritan, give in secret, seek the last place, and lose one's life for Him to gain it from Him? What if these things detailed a Christian's holiness to God and Jesus' continued righteousness to the world? What if seeking to do these "works" of the Holy Spirit living through a Christian fulfilled *"a wise man who built his house on the rock"* (Matthew 7:24b) while hearing them and not doing them fulfilled a Christian life of *"a foolish man who built his house on the sand"* (Matthew 7:26b)? What if both will experience *"And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house"* (Matthew 7:25a, 27a)? What if then, the rock of living out Jesus' red-letters is also the only foundation for endurance, sanctification, fellowship with Jesus in His suffering, glorifying God, and eternal reward?

What if the modern church has become a theological industry to present a "non-works gospel"? What if, truly, the gospel is not about individual works but about a life of works, every day, as in "living"? What if not living out faith in Jesus was a sign that one was never actually "born again"? What if it fulfilled the plethora of Jesus and the New Testament's warnings that are no longer part of the "Christian" church? What if each person must read Jesus' red-letters again, literally and personally, for true saving faith and true eternal life?

What if we are not born again to be lazy, but to be raised as a Carpenter, understand building, and always physically or spiritually building to testify *"My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working"* (John 5:17)

and *"My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work"* (John 4:34)? What if all His red-letter, self-denying, life-losing words are the specifics on how, according to the allotted faith given, we are to each build His kingdom within ourselves and the church?

Perception 60
Master Builder – Foundation

What if Paul also talked about building the Christian life on the right foundation and the materials used to build upon it? What if a foundation is the bottom portion of the building that sits on a particular type of earth? What if spiritually, Jesus talked about the "type of earth" in *"Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock.* (Matthew 7:24) and *"Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand"* (Matthew 7:26)? What if "these word of mine" are not any benign passage in the Bible, but Jesus red-letter, self-denying teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments that He just finished giving in His three-chapter (Matthew 5-7) Sermon on the Mount about how to love God with everything and how to love one's neighbor? What if, unlike the false teaching of the modern church that negates Jesus' teachings as part of "the law" that was subsequently replaced by the cross, forgiveness, and God's grace, His Sermon on the Mount represents the specifics of *"whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life"* (John 3:16b)?

What if Paul teaches about spiritual building with *"According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ"* (1 Corinthians 3:10-11)? What if Paul's teaching about the right foundation was addressing the Corinthian Church's divisions in siding and following one or another "teacher" of the faith (1 Corinthians 3:1-9)? What if the church was divided because they wanted to put their faith on a foundation of Paul's teachings or Apollo's teachings rather than Jesus' teachings on His narrow path of life? What if this is the first occurrence of forming the 20,000+ denominations that now comprise the modern church?

What if faith in Jesus brings eternal life rather than faith in doctrines about salvation? What if the point of Paul's teaching on having faith in the correct "foundation" was that Jesus was the head of the Church and the only authorized teacher, leader, and God of it? What if Jesus said, *"But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ"* (Matthew 23:8-10)? What if only Jesus is *"the author and perfecter of faith"* (Hebrews 12:2b), *"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away"* (Luke 21:33), *"So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ"* (Romans 10:17), and *"If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me"* (John 14:23-24)?

What if the modern church had long ago been placed on the alternative foundations of Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, John Wesley, William Booth, Charles Spurgeon, Joseph Smith, Dennis Bennett, or Lonnie Frisbee? What if most modern churches, like those chasing after Paul or Apollo, have put their faith in the teachings of these church founders, but those teachings (or lifestyles) did not mesh completely, either a little or at all, with Jesus' red-letters? What if, technically, there was faith in some aspect of Jesus, but faith as a foundation laid on the bedrock of His red-letter words and narrow path of life was diluted, negated, or even opposed? What if, currently, much of the modern church has barely any faith in Jesus' words and has been built on thousands of church theology, doctrine, and precept foundations placed on the sand, on which members are encouraged to be comfortable, sift their feet in, and play in all the while knowing that "you're in a hospital for sinners," "God loves you just the way you are," "when God sees you He sees Jesus," "faith not works," "don't try so hard," and "love yourself to love others"?

What if Jesus' words and the New Testament are filled with warnings about this, and why John specifically warned, *"Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds"* (2 John 1:9-11)? What if we just read Jesus' red-letters again, literally and personally, and seek to "endure to the end"?

Perception 61
Master Builders – Building Materials

What if Paul continued his building analogy with *"Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work"* (1 Corinthians 3:12-13)?

What if "building materials" for the church were almost a moot point, given that the church has long abandoned Jesus' bedrock of saving faith to both hear and act upon His red-letter teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments? What if Christians occasionally "hear" a little bit but have no need to "act" on anything because of "faith not works," "Jesus' work is a finished work," "by grace alone," "God loves you just the way you are," and a slew of precepts created by an industry of licentiousness? What if *"For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ"* (1 Corinthians 3:10-11) was a foundation of faith laid upon Jesus and all He said and represented true belief in Him? What if that foundation was long ago distilled into "be born again," "accept Jesus into your heart," "God loves you," and "just believe?" What if it were replaced by a foundation of faith in the teachings of one's favorite reformer or trending pastor, preacher, or church leader?

What if "building materials" for the church was a moot point given it is already on a foundation of faith pretending to be in Jesus but actually built on a plethora of theology, doctrines, and precepts that ignore, twist, and negate anything to do with *"teaching them to obey all that I commanded you"* (Matthew 28:20a)? What if the "Great Commission" was actually the "Great Omission" placing the church on sand rather than on the rock?

What if the Deceiver of the Nations and Accuser of the brethren was still working but, regardless, *"If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself"* (2 Timothy 2:13)? What if He still has *"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me"* (John 10:27) – even through all the precept jargon? What if we need to read Jesus' red-letters again, literally and personally, and implement them into our lives for His rest, joy, and peace, and for preparation for the current and coming storms of life, and for *"that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death"* (Philippians 3:10) and *"fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him"* (Romans 8:17b) and *"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit"* (John 12:24)?

What if His red-letter, self-denying, life-losing teachings are *"the word of My perseverance"* (Rev 3:10b) and the training for *"You will be hated by all because of My name, but the one who endures to the end, he will be saved"* (Mark 13:13)? What if Jesus gave tremendous hope in the *"great multitude" "clothed in white" "before the throne and before the lamb"*? What if the "great multitude" was not "every Christian," as the church teaches, but *"These are the ones who come out of the great*

tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Revelation 7:9-14) because *"they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death"* (Revelation 12:11)?

What if, before His return, "all" the virgins were asleep, but some had been ready with extra oil for their lamp to see their way through the darkness to the bridegroom, and some were not, having no extra oil? What if those ready had purchased the oil and thus already knew the cost of oil for the lamp, so they could continue that cost in going to their Savior? What if teachings about the "cost of discipleship" and following Jesus saturate Jesus' red-letter words and the New Testament, but the church has placed the precept glasses of "faith not works" and "grace alone" over their eyes so they cannot see it?

What if the church has always tried to place its authority above Jesus' authority? What if it even started with Peter and Jesus explained the right way? What if Peter rebuked Jesus to not *"suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed…And He was stating the matter plainly"* (Mark 8:31b, 32a)? What if Jesus responded with *"But turning around and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind Me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's.' And He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? For what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For*

whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels" (Mark 8:33-38)?

What if the church has long since become ashamed of His red-letter words and replaced them with an easier way? What if there is still time to know the cost of following Him by believing all His details on the building materials to love God with everything and to love one's neighbor as oneself?

Perception 62
Our "Self" Efforts

What if modern church teachings of "don't serve God with your own effort," "don't get ahead of God," and "let go and let God" did not have anything to do with believing Jesus for eternal life, but were precepts extending from faith in doctrines "about salvation" rather than faith to obey Jesus?

What if "our efforts" were never really *ours* to begin with? What if God gave us our life in the form of our heart, soul, mind and strength to ultimately serve Him? What if He patiently sustains them for each to live out *"AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH"* (Mark 12:30)? What if "heart, soul, mind, and strength" (HSMS) were every ounce of being and every physical molecule in us, originally given to us, to be given back to Him?

What if emptying oneself for Him was the only fullness of life? What if "our works" are Him working through us, a living testimony of the work He has done for us, and His efforts to continue loving the world? What if *"He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it"* (Matthew 10:39)?

What if "our efforts" became *"He gives strength to the weary, And to him who lacks might He increases power. Though youths grow weary and tired, And vigorous young men stumble badly, Yet those who wait for the LORD Will gain new strength; They will mount up with wings like eagles, They will run and not get tired, They will walk and not become weary"* (Isaiah 40:29-31)?

What if "getting ahead of God" was not possible? What if He directs and steers us while we are moving, not when we are stationary? What if, even at the most incapacitating times, like being sick, we could still "move"? What if "moving" was to witness of Him, be a blessing to those around us, and pray for everyone the Lord brings to mind?

What if *"Cease striving and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth"* (Psalms 46:10) meant that we can have His peace amid the world's calamity and outrage? What if, while giving all to Him with the world taking all from us, we still had His promise of *"Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful"* (John 14:27)?

What if He gave us the motivation to share His glory in *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad"* (2 Corinthians 5:10) and God *"WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation"* (Romans 2:6-8)?

Perception 63
Our "Self" Love

What if self-love was actually a bad thing rather than the good thing taught by the Christian philosophy (precept), "we can't love others until we love ourselves"? What if the lack of love for ourselves actually comes from not being fully with Jesus? What if He said, *"I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing"* (John 15:5)? What if *"abides in Me and I in Him"* was to believe and live by His red-letter, self-denying teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments to *"bear much fruit"*? What if being *"apart from Me you can do nothing"* means you are endlessly floundering and can't seem to do anything, bringing a lack of love for our lives? What if *"apart from Me"* results in a lack of peace, purpose, and power in life?

What if the promotion of self-love was also contrary to Jesus' teaching that *"He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal"* (John 12:25)? What if a true life in Jesus looked like *"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit"* (John 12:24)? What if we hated our lives from the dying part, yet loved our lives in fellowshipping with Jesus as He bears fruit through it?

What if, in following Jesus, our self-love became a good thing, not in the selfishness of it, but as a role model in Jesus' second greatest commandment of *"'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' There is no other commandment greater than these"* (Mark 12:31)? What if the desire for life's securities and blessings became the role model for the securities and blessings of others in need? What if our physical, mental, and emotional needs were real-time examples of how to help another in need? What if we transferred our own worry, anxiety, and insecurities to how others must be feeling? What if we transferred our own loneliness, rejection, or others' indifference to seeking out those who may be lonely, rejected, or ignored?

What if loving others *as ourselves* went beyond just tossing used clothing into a bin? What if Jesus said it as *"Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all of them; for they all out of their surplus put into the offering; but she out of her poverty put in all that she had to live on"* (Luke 21:3-4)? What if the effort of the Good Samaritan provided details (Luke 10:33-37)? What if Jesus' passage on *"the least of these"* was part of receiving eternal life (Matthew 25:31-46)?

What if loving others *as ourselves* sank into our resources of time and money? What if, from there, it sank even deeper into our most intimate resources of personal space and cultural values? What if we did not judge how effective our time and money would be used, but died to ourselves in order to bless others? What if, through giving these things, we found new time and money (Matthew 6:31-34), and that our personal space was filled by Jesus (Matthew 11:29-30), and that our cultural identity was replaced with joy, unspeakable (John 15:10-11)?

Perception 64
Finding God's Will

What if God's will for our lives was not discovering the right career or spouse or church, but was already written out in detail, and the practice of His will would take a lifetime? What if any earthly career, spouse, or church is only the platform and background for the fulfillment of His will? What if all these earthly things are not promised to be stable, but His instructions are?

What if the foundation of God's will to each person is *"'AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.' The second is this, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' There is no other commandment greater than these"* (Mark 12:30-31)? What if Jesus then elaborated on how this is done with His instructions and examples? What if His Sermon on the Mount, alone, contained many of these instructions, and each Christian was expected to read and implement them into the life He provides them, with the allocated faith, heart, soul, mind, and strength that He provides?

What if His instructions were not at all easy, and they took constant thought, readiness, and vigilance on our part? What if His will in our lives were to fight this good fight on whatever platform and background He provides?

What if the platform was not important and would not continue into eternity, but only the accomplishments of His will, on that platform, would last? What if this is a theme of Jesus' and New Testament teaching and Paul summarized it in *"But this I say, brethren, the time has been shortened, so that from now on those who have wives should be as though they had none; and those who weep, as though they did not weep; and those who rejoice, as though they did not rejoice; and those who buy, as though they did not possess; and those who use the world, as though they did not make full use of it; for the form of this world is passing away"* (1 Corinthians 7:29-31)?

What if His will had to start in our hearts and be fulfilled by our words and deeds? What if we even approached it with the ability of small children trying to become more grown-up? What if He gave us the power to fulfill His will? What if we didn't fulfill His will perfectly and made many mistakes? What *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:9) applies to any of those mistakes?

What if, however, the worst mistake was to not seek out His will at all and to opt for the complacency of just being forgiven and then going our own way, in the way we or the modern church thinks best? What if we then became arrogant in being forgiven? What if the two verses flanking 1 John 1:9 (above) were *"If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us"* (1 John 1:8) and *"If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us"* (1 John 1:10)? What if we become arrogant in not needing to do His will because Jesus has done it all? What if we say, spiritually, *"I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing"* (Revelation 3:17a)?

Perception 65
Samaritan or Semantics?

What if Jesus' illustration of "The Good Samaritan" (Luke 10:25-37) is essential for every believer to learn and practice for their Christian life? What if people, however, only wanted the least common denominator for eternal life? What if most want the "free gift" of life without the requirement to use the gift as life, for one's entire life? What if Jesus' words flanking the illustration of "The Good Samaritan" reflected this? What if a lawyer asked Jesus how he could have eternal life? What if the lawyer knew God's law and was testing Jesus with "semantics" about how to have eternal life? What if, however, the answer to the lawyer's question was found in the law and Jesus just happened to be the Author of the Law? What if, rather than answering the lawyer directly, Jesus asked, *"how does it read to you?"*? What if the man gave a correct answer about keeping the greatest commandments and Jesus affirmed it? What if, however, just providing a "biblically correct" answer was not enough, and Jesus said, *"do this and you will live"*?

What if the lawyer's biblically correct answer to Jesus was *"YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND; AND YOUR NEIGHBOR AS*

YOURSELF" (Luke 10:27)? What if the lawyer, however, thought this level of love for God seemed like it would require everything of him, and for too much to be spent on others? What if the man then tried using "semantics" to justify himself, and challenged Jesus for specifics about who (really, what level of "sinner") would be classified as his neighbor? What if Jesus answered with "The Good Samaritan"? What if Jesus, instead of answering "who" is a neighbor, answered who is "neighborly"? What if "neighborly" involved compassion, energy, time, and expense being provided to a stranger who might not appreciate it or take advantage of it? What if, however, this fits with Jesus' other commandments to greet those who don't greet you, love those who don't love you, turn the other cheek, love your enemies, and take care of *"the least of these, My brethren"*? What if the lawyer's correct answer for who was the most neighborly was *"the one who showed mercy"*? What if Jesus, again, gave the same conclusion of *"go and do the same"*?

What if Jesus still says, *"do this and you will live"* and *"go and do the same"*? What if, however, the modern church uses "semantics" that the lawyer was arguing about eternal life under God's law, and they're no longer under the law but under faith? What if they said they're assured of salvation by faith alone and not by works? What if that argument negated having to love God with everything and loving their neighbors as themselves?

What if we really are saved through faith, but faith is defined by believing the Savior rather than just believing in doctrines about salvation? What if this includes believing the Savior saying, *"do this and you will live"*? What if proof of a "saving faith" is seen in our obedience to Him by demonstrating mercy and the many other "works" of real life that He told us to do in His red-

letter, self-denying teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments? What if true faith generated a spirit in us that desired to do those works? What if they were not even counted as *our* works, but as *His* works lived through us? What if *"...it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me..."* (Galatians 2:20b)?

What if, even with that, we say that we continued the semantics with never having seen anyone who was robbed, beaten, and lying half naked in the roadway, or that we don't own a donkey to help get the man to safety, or that, anyway, the denarius is no longer a viable currency? What if, however, there are many people all around us who need to be shown mercy, and God will direct us to them if we ask? What if we now have way more resources than a donkey and antiquated currency? What if the correct level of giving is *"for they all put in out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in all she owned, all she had to live on"* (Mark 12:44)?

What if "semantics" over God's word has been Satan's main method of deception since the first sin? What if endless quibbling over semantics was only a smokescreen for disobedience to His word? What if, by semantics, we could continually take from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, look intelligent and wise, yet still be fruitless and not walking with God? What if Jesus' salvation is a "free gift" and God wants us to be immersed in semantics, but the semantics of how to use that gift according to Jesus' red-letters, every day, to His glory? What if God said, *"This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!"* (Matthew 17:5)? What if Jesus said, *"You are My friends if you do what I command you"* (John 15:14)?

Perception 66
The Path of Peace

What if a life filled with *"Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful"* (John 14:27) lay in stark contrast to *"AND THE PATH OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN"* (Romans 3:17)? What if our lives reflected more of one than the other?

What if the Christian life were not a "one and done" sinner's prayer, "Jesus' work is a finished work," "God loves me just as I am," and "faith never works," but a two-step process? What if the steps were: 1) becoming holy by ridding ourselves of what is unholy to God, and 2) replacing those things with all that is considered righteous to God? What if failure at either of these things resulted in the lack of His peace?

What if Jesus' teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments were the only formula for true life? What if not living out His formula was not really life? What if His teachings were just as important as the gospel itself? What if *"Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son"* (2 John 1:9)?

Perception 67
Grace for Fat and Lazy?

What if God has given us grace to be spiritually "fat and happy," "lazy and restful," or "fat and lazy"? What if that's because *"So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed"* (John 8:36) and *"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest"* (Matthew 11:28) and *"I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing"* (Revelation 3:17a)? What if Christians live by Jesus' righteousness, not their own? What if "when God sees me, He sees a sinless Jesus rather than a sinful me? What if we live by "faith not by works"? What if His grace covers all my weaknesses? What if we don't need to strive to please Him but rest in His finished work? What if all this is real faith that triumphs over any of our own works or efforts?

What if, however, these things were false precepts of a deceived church that has replaced faith in the Savior with faith in doctrines about salvation? What if it were just way easier to believe in doctrines rather than in Jesus' red-letter, self-denying, life-losing teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments? What if it were easy for the modern church to teach and embrace those doctrines? What if it were way easier to focus on and believe anything else in God's written word rather than Jesus, the Living Word, and His red-letter teachings?

What if we are spiritually born-again, not to be spiritually "fat and happy," "lazy and restful," or "fat and lazy" but to live-again, according to His narrow path of life? What if His commandments are self-denying and life-losing but *"His commandments are not burdensome"* (1 John 5:3b)? What if obedience to them was spiritual food for our souls, spirits, and even bodies? What if it was the same as for Jesus in *"My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work"* (John 4:34)? What if our work is to believe the works that Jesus commanded us and continue *"I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored and you have entered into their labor"* (John 4:38)?

What if His works are to pursue holiness, forgive those who sin against us to continue His forgiveness of us, or to receive His mercy by the mercy we show others, or to turn the other cheek, go another mile, and give our coats as well when dealing with oppression? What if they are to greet those who don't greet us, love those who don't love us, and love our enemies? What if His works are to take care of *"the least of these My brethren"* who are in hunger, in thirst, strangers, naked, sick, or in prison? What if they are to confess Him to a hateful world for Him to confess us? What if they are to be the good Samaritan, yielding time and resources for others, to those He shows us? What if we are to flee immorality as we are His peacemakers, His priests, and His ministers to anyone who is around us? What if we are not to let our left hand know the good works that our right hand is doing? What if we are not to look in lust, not remarry if divorced, not love the world and its lusts, and pursue His holiness, even to the level of *"do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell"* (Matthew 10:28)?

Perception 68
Self-Love

What if the "love of self" went beyond simple selfishness, self-indulgence, and narcissism? What if it also included the love of everything that we consider as part of ourselves? What if it included our spouses, children, health, friends, jobs, possessions, and even ministries done to the Lord? What if self-love actually included loving the life that the Lord had given us and blessed us with?

What if self-love were the love of those blessings? What if self-love became a love of the blessing that replaced the love of the One Who blessed us, even though we occasionally thanked Him for the blessings? What if we still loved the blessings more than the One Who blesses, even though we regularly sang "I surrender all"?

What if Jesus summarized this to us in, *"Now large crowds were going along with Him; and He turned and said to them, 'If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple'"* (Luke 14:25-26)? What if He also gave a practical example in *"A man was giving a big dinner, and he invited many; and at the dinner hour he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, 'Come; for everything is ready now.' But they all alike began to make*

excuses. The first one said to him, 'I have bought a piece of land and I need to go out and look at it; please consider me excused.' Another one said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please consider me excused.' Another one said, 'I have married a wife, and for that reason I cannot come' (Luke 14:16-20)?

What if love of all that the Lord has given us caused us to disregard much or all that Jesus commanded us? What if the church's incessant focus on "grace" with no "narrow path" of Jesus substantiated and perpetuated that? What if constant vigilance to His commands were required to keep ourselves from drifting outside the umbrella of His will so that our lives were not placed in mortal and spiritual danger?

What if the warnings under the Old Covenant were still relevant to the New Covenant? What if the Old Covenant warnings looked like *"Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes which I am commanding you today; otherwise, when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived in them, and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery"* (Deuteronomy 8:11-14) and *"Otherwise, you may say in your heart, 'My power and the strength of my hand made me this wealth'"* (Deuteronomy 8:17) with the consequence of *"It shall come about if you ever forget the LORD your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I testify against you today that you will surely perish"* (Deuteronomy 8:19)?

What if the New Covenant warnings were similar and looked like *"If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me. These things I have spoken to you while abiding with you"* (John 14:23-25) with the consequence of *"If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned"* (John 15:6) and *"Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits. Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter"* (Matthew 7:19-21)?

What if everything is given to us so that we do not have to go this route? What *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:9)? What if *"For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome"* (1 John 5:3)? What if "good works" were not four-letter words, but were Christ's works, living through us? What if self-love was replaced by loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength (HSMS) and loving our neighbor as ourselves, and we discovered that all the peace, purpose, and power of Jesus came through it?

Perception 69
The Calling

What if, facetiously, all Christians were called to teach Sunday School, and failing to do so would prove that they were not really saved? What if all Christians will only obtain an honorable place in God's kingdom if they take the parking spot farthest away so that others can have the closer ones? What if all Christians were supposed to put a Jesus bumper sticker on their car? What if they must, to have any reward in heaven, volunteer at a soup kitchen, a prison outreach, or a home upgrade project for low-income families? What if, to have any inheritance from their heavenly Father, they had to go on short or long-term Christian mission trips? What if they must share their extra clothes, food, and household items with those who can't afford them? What if they would only be considered holy enough for heaven if they ceased to entertain themselves by the immorality, violence, and self-righteous justice plots on television, movies, and social media? What if Jesus would only consider them to be His friends if they drove their cars with humility by obeying the law and yielding their right of way (with forgiveness) to those who demand it for themselves? What if Jesus ordered Christians to forgive intrusive neighbors, or else risk having their own forgiveness of sins revoked? What if each Christian could only obtain God's peace by making

cookies or a meal for people struggling with illness or hardship? What if the right to call oneself a Child of God depended on one's willingness to send a card of encouragement to those sick or enduring hardship? What if the condition of Jesus to acknowledge a person as a "Christian" to His Heavenly Father absolutely required that person to pass out tracts at a football game? What if a Christian will only receive mercy from Jesus when they choose not to retaliate against someone or sue them?

What if there were many other such things in the New Testament for the "conditions" of what a real child of God looks and acts like? What if these "conditions" were not facetious but were the spirit of being a true child of God according to what Jesus said in His red-letter, self-denying teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments? What if there were more instructions for what a child of God will look like, and there were warnings after warnings of not caring about these instructions? What if the instructions could be pursued the amount of faith allocated to each believer (Romans 12:3) with however little or much education a person had, with how little or great material possessions a person had, with how little or much time a person had, with how ugly or elegant a person did them, with how little or great understanding a person had about them, or with how many or few mistakes a person had while doing them?

What if there were two types of interpretations of "God's grace" in the Bible? What if there was true grace for fighting the good fight of being and acting like a child of God for one's whole life, and false grace for one deciding not to fight at all? What if there was true grace to seek Jesus' words *"be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect"* no matter how imperfectly, and false grace for conceding that, "I'm not perfect, just forgiven" "I'm

resting in Jesus' finished work," "when God sees sinful me, He sees righteous Jesus," and "our efforts negate faith in Jesus' perfect work"? What if there was true grace to want Jesus to shine through us by His works done through us, and false grace to regard His works through us as if they were "dead works" or "filthy rags"?

What if having our sins forgiven, repentance of our former life, and growing as a child of God were proven by how we believed, obeyed, and followed Jesus? What if there were all kinds of deceptions in Christianity, introduced to the church by God's enemy throughout the centuries, to create as many illegitimate children of God as possible? What if Jesus knew this would happen and so warned us over and over to examine ourselves and test ourselves against His red-letter words on being a true child? What if He warns us out of love, and makes the warnings easy to fix because of His cleansing blood, and indwelling Holy Spirit? What if He says that His commandments are not burdensome, and that His blessings will flow from His self-denying, life-losing red-letter instructions?

What if the Christian life will cost everything we hold dear, but, because of it, we are astonished that we gain more than we could have ever dreamt, both now and for eternity? What if *"He was saying to them all, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels'"* (Luke 9:23-26)?

Perception 70
Time in a Bottle

What if modern church theology, doctrines, and precepts were opposite to Jesus' red-letter, self-denying teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments, and promoted a lazy body of Christ? *What if Jesus Were Lazy* was a book about the body of Christ being in contrast to His head? What if laziness was central to the apostasy that precedes the End Times as mentioned by Paul in *"Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction"* and *"For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way"* (2 Thessalonians 2:3,7)? What if the church has voided God's law and made Jesus' red-letters part of that Law?

What if *"For this reason it says, 'Awake, sleeper, And arise from the dead, And Christ will shine on you.' Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is"* (Ephesians 5:14-17)? What if *"the will of the Lord is"* Jesus' red-letter, self-denying, life-losing teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments to be lived out through each believer?

What if God is still warning us with *"But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?'"* (Luke 12:20), *"Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God"* (1 Corinthians 10:31), *"We must work the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day; night is coming when no one can work"* (John 9:4), and *"For a little while longer the Light is among you. Walk while you have the Light, so that darkness will not overtake you; he who walks in the darkness does not know where he goes. While you have the Light, believe in the Light, so that you may become sons of Light"* (John 12:35-36a)?

What if, each day, we must wake up from the anxiety of life and the comforts of this world to avoid *"And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful"* (Matthew 13:22)?

What if salvation begins with His propitiation of sins, but a continuation with Him living through us as we strive for that each day? What if we are only born again to live again, or we were never born again? What if *"Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. Do this, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts"* (Romans 13:10-14)?

Perception 71
Trail Running

What if trails were the best way to walk, jog, or run because one could bask in the glory of God's creation around them and commune with God, even if it's too hot, too cold, too wet, too muddy, too rough, too steep, too buggy, or too hard? What if Jesus' narrow path of life, according to His red-letter, self-denying, life-losing instructions, were the spiritual equivalent of trails to commune with our Heavenly Father? What if, however, we were constantly leaving Jesus' narrow path (or worse, thought we never needed it because we're "saved") and required His discipline and reproof to find it or get back on it? What if that involved some sort of suffering, but that's great because suffering then has a temporal and eternal purpose? What if even Jesus, *"Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered"* (Hebrews 5:8)? What if *"After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you"* (1 Peter 5:10)?

What if, while on the narrow trail, there was some spiritual apprehension of twisting an ankle, or slipping off into the bush, mud, water, embankment, or cliff, or ending up lost on a misleading side trail? What if, spiritually, one had apprehension and awareness that deliberate sin must

be constantly fought or that any stumbling must be quickly confessed to stay on His narrow path? What if we found that the "fear of God" acted as a guardrail to stay on the right path and was the support to keep from falling over the cliff? What if we found that it was also a stepping stone to get us quickly back on His path if we did stumble?

What if, however, Christians dismissed the fear of God because *"There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love"* (1 John 4:18)? What if "no fear of God" is certainly the goal but it is contingent on having a perfect love for God, which most Christians may not have? What if Jesus is the only one (known for certain) who had perfect love for His Father? What if Jesus also said, *"But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him!"* (Luke 12:5)?

What if we must carry on with *"Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you"* (Philippians 3:12-15)?

What if a fear of God, by following all Jesus' red letter warnings and judgments, was the only way to not walk away from God, not become permanently lost, or not be found on the "spiritual sand"? What if Paul continues his above warning with *"For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are*

enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things" (Philippians 3:18-19)? What if there is fear, but His forgiveness and guidance out of that fear is more than abundant if we want it? What if trail hiking or walking is hard, but the rewards of His rest, joy, and peace are the only real life?

Perception 72
What if Jesus were Lazy, too?

What if the modern church was the "laziest church" – the laziest body of Christ – throughout its history? What if Jesus said of it, *"I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. Because you say, 'I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing…'"* (Revelation 3:15-17a)? What if Jude gave the strongest warning, and it's a coincidence that his letter comes just before The Book of Revelation? What if he said, *"For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ"* (Jude 1:4)? What if these people are not nonbelievers but so called "believers" who accept church-made theologies and doctrines that *"turn the grace of our God into licentiousness"*? What if, however, they also *"deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ"* through precepts that ignore, twist, and negate His red-letter, self-denying, life-losing teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments?

What if the modern church is a field of "tares" that has long ago ignored *"Let no one in any way deceive you"* to await *"for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction"* (2 Thessalonians 2:3)? What if most are waiting for a pre-tribulation rapture, not realizing that all they have is pre-tribulation apostasy? What if Jesus is still answering all End-Times questions with *"You will be hated by all because of My name, but the one who endures to the end, he will be saved"* (Mark 13:13)?

What if Jesus, however, is not lazy and is still working in those who hear His voice? What if He is still giving extra oil for lamps to those willing to know the cost of discipleship, still blessing the talents that are dug out of the hole to be used for Him, still giving wedding clothes for the righteous deeds He told His saints to do, still going to say, *"Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world"* (Matthew 25:34) for those who fulfilled *"Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it* [cared for those hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, sick, or in prison] *to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me"* (Matthew 25:40)?

What if the modern church thinks all Christians comprise the heavenly host described in Revelation, *"After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb'"* (Revelation 7:9-10)? What if, however, the heavenly host was specifically defined by: *"Then one of the elders answered, saying to me* [John],

'These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?' I said to him, 'My lord, you know.' And he said to me, 'These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb' (Revelation 7:13-14)? What if other criteria for them being there included *"And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death"* (Revelation 12:11)? What if this was not a dreadful, horrible thing but a hopeful thing *"For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS"* (Matthew 16:25-27)? What if this is because other verses following John 3:16 include *"But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God"* (John 3:21)?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kirk McCrea became a Jesus-believing Christian in December 1979 and was amazed by the forgiveness he felt for his own sins, which were less than 20 years old, and for his poor handling of the sins of others against him. He was even more amazed at reading Jesus' words in the gospels about how Christians are to think, act, and live. Here was a reason not to be disappointed, angry, or resentful of others. Here was a reason not to steal, lie, and be self-centered for "survival of the fittest" against others' criticisms and hindrances. Here was a reason to "be good" for God in the ways that His Son said and, even if it wasn't pleasing to others, it was pleasing to Him. Here was a reason not to live for oneself or for others' opinions, but for God. This all registered as "great news" and brought immediate "rest for his soul."

Kirk was very eager to start this new life with all its blessings and to have more of that "rest" which came from believing and following Jesus. He was eager to gain the biblical knowledge that others had and to see how this new life was to be lived out. God led him to a Christian group in college and a new church at home to grow in fellowship with other believers. There, he soaked up all the teachings and soon got baptized. After some time, however, Kirk felt empty and dismayed, without knowing why, and he even asked his pastor and friends if this was

all there was to Christianity – being born again, prayer, going to church, attending Bible study, and occasionally witnessing to others. The pastor winced in empathy but could only encourage Kirk to wait on God for His direction.

Kirk then spent the next twenty-four years trying to find God's direction for how disappointments, backsliding, resentment, rebellion, illnesses, or injuries made any sense for someone who had once wanted God in their life. Kirk's "personal relationship" with Jesus was not going so well: he wasn't too hot, and he wasn't lukewarm, but he was definitely cold, and that led to years of coldness and backsliding.

God, however, had mercy to allow Kirk to become weary of not having Him in his life. It was only His mercy that separated this from him being just seeds on a rock or among the weeds that grow a bit, then die (Matthew 13:1-23), or from becoming one of *"For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ"* (Philippians 3:18).

Kirk needed to decide which church and its teachings he wanted to return to, but it occurred to him that Jesus needed to be the One who discipled him. So, just like the start of that "personal relationship" decades before, he was instantly amazed by Jesus' red-letter, self-denying teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments about how Christians are to think, act, and live. Kirk rediscovered that this was faith and the reason to live. He rediscovered that Jesus' words *were* God's directions for his life, and that they would be more than enough. Jesus redefined Kirk's personal relationship with Him according to His red letters – and His promises of peace, purpose, and power that would come from pursuing His redefinition. Kirk realized that he needed to attend and

minister to the body, but listen to the Head and filter everyone else through Him.

Jesus calls every Christian to a personal relationship with Him by being "yoked" to Him (yes, with a spiritually heavy, wooden, unbending yoke between Him and them) to learn His ways to plow and farm His Father's kingdom. To the flesh, this looks (and often feels) horrible, but to the soul, it is pure "rest." After a couple of decades of being yoked to learn, resist, yield, need, and enjoy the process, Kirk can say that it's the only way to live and the only true life. Jesus' ways are the only way to have purpose, perseverance, and hope in all trials and temptations, one day at a time. They are also the only way (as He repeatedly warns) to prepare, keep watch, and stay alert for the disastrous floods that are about to precede His return in *"But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs. Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name. At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another"* (Matthew 24:8-10).

While there's lots more on his website (https://www.kingsbooktable.org), the only real necessity is to believe, follow, and live by Jesus' red letters.